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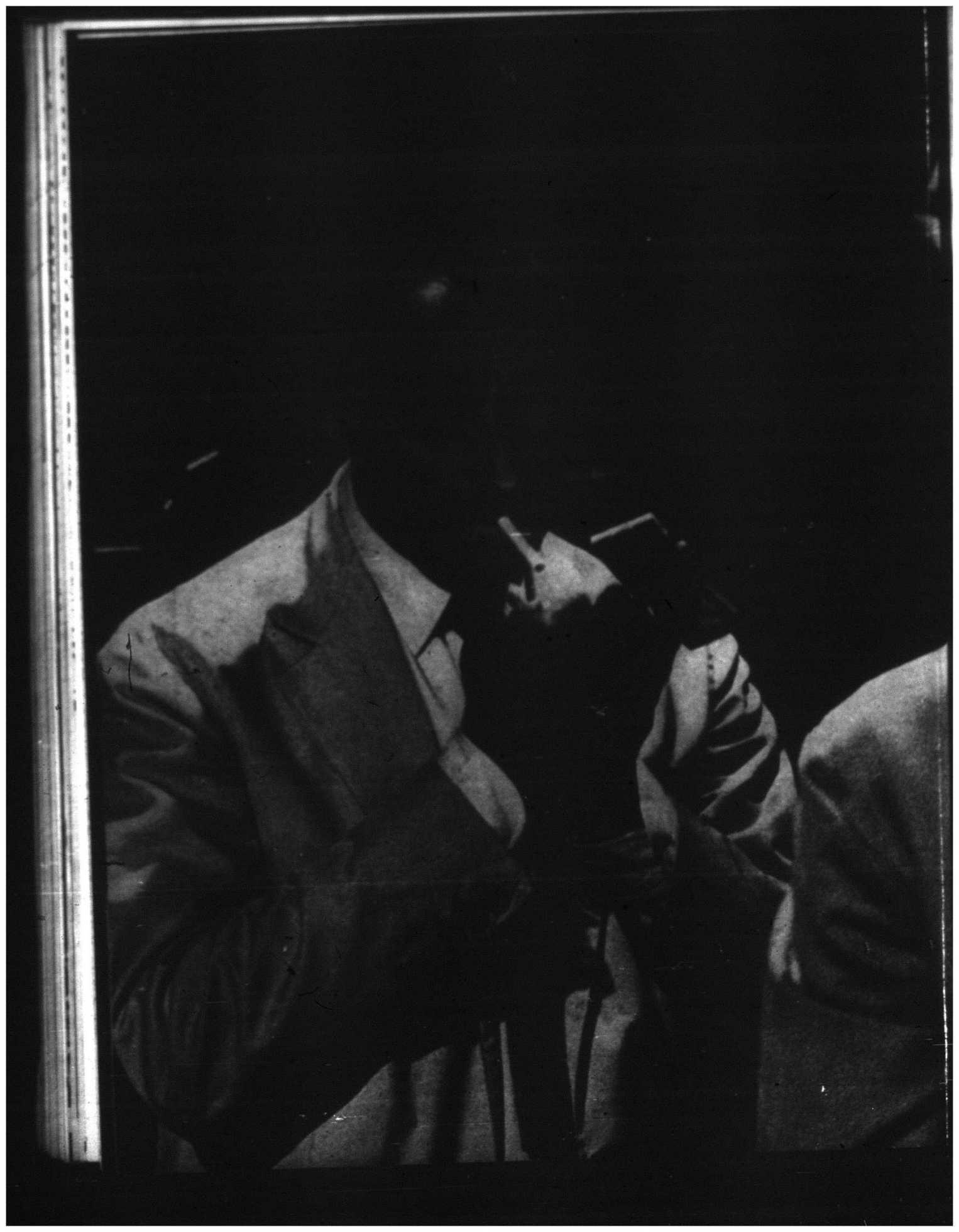
A motion MONOGRAPH
Foreword by
MICHELANGELO ANTONIONI



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I distrust all those who know unhesitatingly just what the cinema is; what poetry is, and how to classify one with the other. To me it seems only a few days have to pass for a change to take place and what was first a certainty becomes a doubt. The road a director has to travel in order to make a film is full of mistakes, of doubts, of faults, but the greatest difficulty comes when he is asked to talk about his work. He has followed his own personal law which is not easy, even for him, to identify.

Reflections on the cinema in general and on a director in particular have, one could say, a dynamic character, in the sense of varying relevance. The instability of today's cinema, its availabilty, its ability to break up and re-arrange itself, to absorb and reject, are reasons enough to review, periodically, all our opinions from the beginning. A stronger reason is if the director is me.

The one thing which seems certain to me is that our endeavour — speaking of modern directors — must be to relate the facts of our personal experience to those of a more general experience. Does this mean that our work must be, in some way, preoccupied with morals and ethics? It is possible. But it signifies above all that that preoccupation will be sterile if it does not succeed in some way in giving a sincere justification for the decisions that life has obliged me to make.

The greatest danger of the cinema, in my opinion, lies in the extraordinary possibilities of lying, of falsifying. To be aware of, to guard against this is already to put oneself on the right road.

Michelangelo Antonioni

Michelangelo Antonioni.

(Translated by Gordon Reid)

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CROYDON CRO 6655	March 3—9 March 10—16	Rodgers and Hammerstein's **OKLAHOMA** (u) **A TALE OF TWO CITIES** (u) **The Vanishing Prairie** (u)
DALSTON CLI 6677	March 3—9 March 10—13 March 17—20	BRANDO, **ONE EYED JACKS** (a) **TERMINUS** (u) USTINOV, **THE SUNDOWNERS** (u) **Flame Of Araby** (u) **A TASTE OF HONEY** (x) **CURSE OF FRANKENSTEIN** (x)
KILBURN MAI 6767	March 3—9 March 10—16	Sellers, Loren, **THE MILLIONAIRESS** (u) **Midnight Lace** (a) SINATRA, **FROM HERE TO ETERNITY** (a) **Meet Me Tonight**(a)
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PRAED ST. PAD 5716	March 3—9 March 10—16 March 25—30	**DOCTOR AT SEA** (u) **GARDEN OF EVIL** (a) **THE GLENN MILLER STORY** (u) **THE NAVY LARK** (u) MARLON BRANDO, **ON THE WATERFRONT** (a)
STOCKWELL BRI 2513	March 3—9 March 10—13 March 14—16	Kenneth More, **REACH FOR THE SKY** (u) **Attempt To Kill** (u) **HOUSE OF FRANKENSTEIN** (x) **SON OF DRACULA** (a) Yul Brynner, Deborah Kerr, **THE KING AND I** (u)
TOOTING BEC. BAL 5566	March 3—9 March 10—16	**THE GRASS IS GREENER** (a) **WOMAN'S WORLD** (u) Troy Donahue, **A SUMMER PLACE** (a) **The River's Edge** (a)
VOGUE TOOTING BAL 6788	March 3—9 March 10—16	**ADAM AND EVE** (a) Jean Seberg, **INFIDELITY** (x) **PARIS PLAYGIRLS** (x) Jacques Sernas, **LOST LIVES** (a)

INTRODUCTION

ASSESSMENT of the work of a film director while his career is still in full swing is an untimely presumption but of irresistible attraction to the film critic. The drawing of provisional conclusions and the speculation as to future trends has a value so transistory as to be questionable anywhere but in a regular journal where erroneous prophecies can later be suitably ammended in the definitive obituary biography. There is some justification, however, for presenting at this time a study of the films of Michelangelo Antonioni. With 'L'Eclisse', Antonioni reached a necessary but enigmatic crucial point in his work. The film completed a trilogy which began almost independently of its author with 'L'Avventura', and then followed with pessimistic permutations a full cycle of love affairs. The cycle completed, Antonioni has admitted to some uncertainty about his next step in the cinema; 'L'Eclisse' was made in 1961 and only recently has come definite news of what is to follow. It will indeed be a new departure, for the simple reason that 'Deserto Rosso' is to be in colour: 'I want to paint the film as one paints a canvas; I want to invent the colour relationships, and not limit myself by photographing only natural colours.' The possibilities of expression which this medium new to Antonioni will afford him suggests even more that the completed trilogy and the films which led up to it can be seen in immediate perspective.

'. . . . his characters endure what passes for living . . . ' — Lucia Bosè and Massimo Girotti in 'Cronaca di un Amore'.

Riccardo?' It is the confirmation of what has been expressed by one of the most meaningful silences since talkies began; with an assortment of details — the ashtray, Vittoria's restlessness, the dawn outside — Antonioni implies a long night of argument and debate in which the couple has talked itself to a halt. The final decision must be made.

Suddenly curtains are drawn back as if from the screen itself, and through the window we see outside a building exactly and unbelievably like a mushroom, the discovery of which must have afforded Antonioni very great satisfaction. For this alien fungoid of an architectural aberration, lurking by the house like a plume of concrete smoke, is explicit both as a phallic and an atomic symbol — and in both senses it dominates the concerns of contemporary civilisation. Throughout the film, less facile mushroom images recur in reminder of this baleful structure and its implications; never very far from one's consciousness at the best of times, it takes a lot of forgetting. At this instance it is the signal, not unnaturally, for Riccardo to become active; he tries to enfold Vittoria by the window, but she breaks away. He pleads: 'I want to make you happy.' She answers: 'When I first met you I was twenty; I was happy then.'

She tells him that she won't be able to do any more translations for him but can find someone else to do them instead (from which we deduce another aspect of their relationship as well as of Vittoria's abilities), and again starts to leave. Again he stops her, this time with urgent questions: 'Don't you love me or want to marry me any more? When did you stop loving me? There must be some reason?' Vittoria's reply is the same each time (we learn later it is all she seems able to say in such a situation): 'I don't know'. At last she goes out, as he slumps moodily in front of one of the numerous abstract paintings and prints on the walls of his room; this one looks like an American s-f paperback cover, but without any human figures on it — thanks to the short film which accompanies 'L'Eclisse' on its first London run, one inevitably recalls the brutal tournaments between Karel Appel and his canvases, conducted with a passion in keeping with Riccardo's uncertain but irritable frame of mind.

Out in the morning air, Vittoria walks past the mushroom building to the tune of a disturbing melody on the soundtrack, and on down the middle of the road. Vittoria always walks down the middle of the road. The amount of time Vittoria spends in the middle of roads during 'L'Eclisse' leads to all sorts of tempting conclusions about her character, but I suspect Antonioni is just taking advantage of his spectacularly deserted location, the Viale dell'Umanesimo in Rome, to isolate his heroine in an unexpected way. A car comes up behind her; it is Riccardo, firmly bent on reconciliation. Vittoria refuses a lift and cuts across some wooded wasteland, so that he has to ditch the car to follow her. They arrive at Vittoria's gate, where Riccardo suggests breakfast at a café hidden at the bend of the highway. Her reply is an emphatic renunciation of all he has to offer: 'I'm not hungry, Riccardo. I'm not hungry.'

She makes an apologetic attempt to get into his head that everything is through ('Last night was terrible for me too'), but he refuses to accept it, although he does finally depart ('I'll be telephoning'); the iron bars of the gate crash firmly behind him as if shutting him off from her life and at the same time imprisoning her in loneliness. She goes through glass doors to her apartment, which is one in a menagerie of expensive-looking modern flats, wearily lets herself in (revealing record covers in a strip on the wall and a mushroom-shaded lamp-stand), and from outside we see her go to the window and stare at foliage opposite. It is agitated by the wind and specifically signifies the agitation of her own thoughts; Antonioni used the image once in 'L'Avventura', but in 'L'Eclisse' it crops up several times (too frequently, to my mind). There is no reason at this stage to be confident that Vittoria's bid for independence will succeed; this is intentional — Antonioni wants us to realise that she is going against the social grain. The big weakness about the relationship from which she is endeavouring to escape is that Antonioni never tells us what was wrong with it. We must take on trust that there was plenty wrong, and that it was mostly Riccardo; but closer acquaintance with Vittoria leads to some considerable doubts.

The next sequence begins outside the Rome Stock Exchange as Vittoria arrives, contriving to be in mid-street even though she's in a taxi. She goes in search of her mother who is somewhere in the thick of speculators limbering up for the day's investments. She has a lot of difficulty making her way through the crowds (symbolic — she doesn't really belong here), during which time we see her mother (Lilla Brignone) bullying an agent, Piero (Alain Delon). Her mother introduces Vittoria to Piero; they move casually to shake hands. As their hands touch, a bell rings, everything stops, and a death by heart-failure is announced . . .

Separated by a stone pillar, they observe a disrespectful one minute's silence, broken only by the strident clamour of telephones and by Piero's murmur around the stone: 'One minute

here costs millions.' His mercenary callousness is a characteristic to which Antonioni will return later; even at this early stage it doesn't seem to win Vittoria's approval. The silence ends (sticklers for detail will note that the ending coincides exactly with a change on the horological indicator from 12.31 to 12.32), and with a promptness which never fails to get a laugh the racket of financial enterprise is deafeningly resumed. Mother and Piero vanish into the fray, and Vittoria makes for the open air; however, her mother catches up with her in the street and Vittoria gets another chance to talk about the break with Ricardo. The parental ears are deaf; her mother, the hardened gambler accustomed to dealing in thousands, is haggling over the price of pears. 'Will you be having lunch with Riccardo?' she asks brightly. Vittoria gives up. 'Yes, with Riccardo'. Again we are made to realise the difficulty Vittoria is having in following the path she has decided upon. Nobody believes in it but herself.

At home that night, Vittoria produces a hammer from an unlikely drawer and knocks a nail into the wall from which she intends to hang a newly acquired sign of her good taste — a block of (possibly) amber, containing a fossilised plant. The hammering provokes a visit from a neighbour, Anita (Rossana Rory), whose husband, an air-pilot, is trying to sleep in readiness for a trip next day. As they chat there is a phone-call from another neighbour, Marta (Mirella Ricciardi); thanks to the proximity of their flats she has seen they are awake (people are always looking into other people's homes in Antonioni's films), and she invites them over to keep her company. Vittoria has been saying to Anita: 'I feel tired and disorientated. There are days when a chair, a table, a book, or a man, are all the same.' We now see the first of her attempts at reorientation after having reached an outlook perilously close to that of Judith in 'The Savage Eye' or of Agnes Varda's 'Cleo'. For Marta's husband works in Kenya and her flat is full of trophies, photographs, and native ornaments, in which Antonioni and Vittoria are both tremendously interested. The screen is filled with photographs for several shots — a picture of Lake Naivasha, of Mount Kilimanjaro, of a sixty-foot high mushroom-shaped baobab tree contemplated by a group of lions. Rifles on the wall, a zebra-skin and an elephant's-foot table on the floor, drum-rhythms on the record-player: the conversation speaks of danger, of unrest, of political anarchy (Antonioni's attitude towards the explosive fascination of the African continent is in keeping with other Italian projects by Lattuada, Pasolini, Bennati, and Giorgio Moser, as well as by Allegret and Ciampi),but for Vittoria Africa spells excitement, escape, primitive simplicity. There is a pan across a row of photographs, at the end of which appears a mud-coloured, negroid Vittoria, hair on end, neck supported on a column of brass rings, eyes flashing with delight. Like Dallas in 'Hatari!', or like a character from Conrad, she is temporarily absorbed by the heart of darkness. In the heavy shadows of the room she leaps, cavorts, and shakes a spear with mock savagery, while the metallic clash and thump of recorded native instruments echoes around her.

The mood is broken by Marta, who has seen enough of the real Africa to find no pleasure in the thought of it while her husband is still there. She turns off the record, crying: 'That's enough; stop it!' — and the three of them sit down a little awkwardly to drinks. Marta talks African politics, but Vittoria's notions die hard; Marta's poodle escapes into the night, and as they go in pursuit Vittoria says she envies her hostess for having a home in Kenya, because 'happiness is easier there, and things are more simple'. Marta says she hates the place. And when Vittoria catches up with the runaway dog ('Do *you* have problems too?'), a long row of flagpoles beside her clinks in the wind in almost exactly the rhythm she has been dancing to; Antonioni is linking two jungles, the ancient and the modern, to show us there can be no escape from one into the other. Lamp-lights hang in the blackness above and behind Vittoria as she listens to the unnerving music; and each light is shaped like a mushroom.

When Vittoria is at last in bed she is disturbed by Riccardo, who has returned to the attack. He calls to her from outside her window but she hides from him and makes for the telephone as he rattles the glass doors of the entrance to the flats; he can see, but not pass, through them — it is like his problem with Vittoria. She calls someone we assume is a mutual friend and tells him the situation: 'Riccardo is going through a difficult time at the moment. Stay close to him.' The voice on the phone aspires to a different manner of consolation: 'I'd rather stay close to you'. Vittoria just can't get away from predatory men.

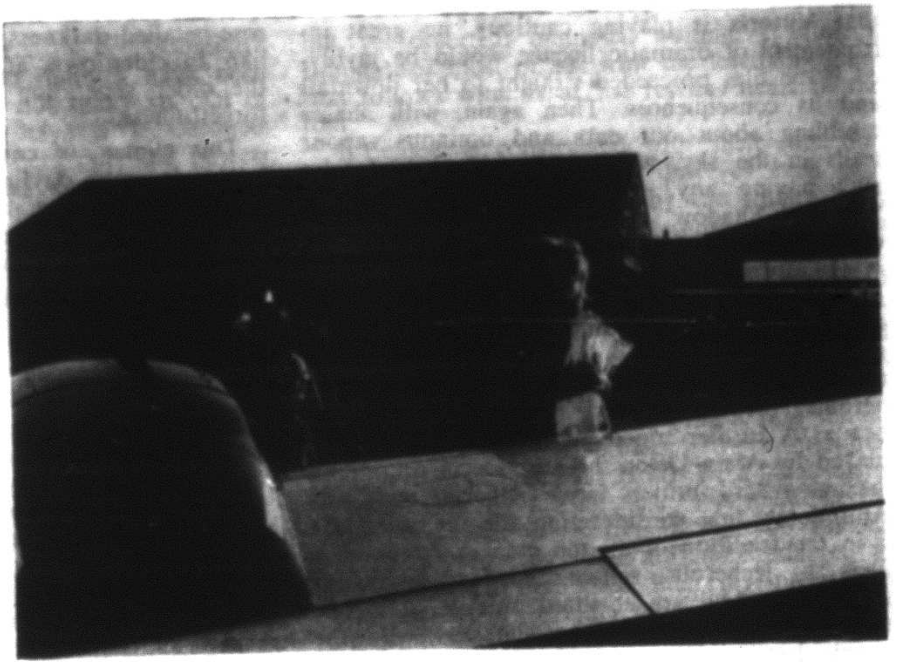
In the next sequence, very logically, Vittoria gets away from it all; she goes with Anita and her pilot husband in a small private aeroplane to Verona. Their trip originally included a storm, which forced them off course, but nothing is now left of this except possibly one otherwise unintelligible shot of Anita looking nervous. In its present form the whole episode of the air-trip is a delicious piece of hedonism, and for Vittoria it represents the only bit of genuine escape and uninterrupted peace in the whole film. She enthuses about nimbo-stratus

clouds, she delights in the movement of the aircraft, she questions the pilot about his job — 'What's the most difficult thing for you to do?', to which he replies (and the answer can be taken in several ways): 'To arrive where we want to get to.' Below them the landscape wheels past with the remote unreality of a Road Safety model, and there is a shot of an arena which could be either geographical or distantly phallic. Antonioni enjoys himself with the arrival at Verona Aero Club; the position of the camera in front of the aircraft as it rolls to a halt indicates the same weakness for the fascination of thing mechanical as does the helicopter-arrival scene in 'L'Avventura'. The others go off to telephone and Vittoria is left to herself and the sunlight; in the sky, 'Last Day of Summer' type jet-planes draw silent patterns of vapour, but the menace that they imply is too distant to seem anything more than the shadow of a dream. As if this were an African allegory, two negroes relax on the verandah of the clubhouse, while faint sounds of conversation drift on the air. Playing on the club juke-box is a lazy, soothing instrumental version of Pat Boone's recent sentimental ballad, 'Words' — in its turn based on that *schmaltz* of a hymn to enduring love, 'Silver Hairs among the Gold'. Vittoria seats herself contentedly in the sun and smiles at Anita as she arrives; 'It's wonderful here,' she says, and with this euphoric acknowledgement the scene and the record come simultaneously to blissful conclusion.

The idyllic mood is promptly shattered by the opening of the Stock Exchange. Antonioni follows his brilliant study of individual contentment with an equally brilliant demonstration of collective panic. The rhythm of the Stock Exchange sequence builds to its frantic climax with Wagnerian splendour, enhanced by a wealth of lesser themes — the travels of a small hand-fan, the problems of particular shareholders, the superstitious activities of Vittoria's mother, the quicksilver swindlings by Piero. And while a crash on the Exchange is remorselessly reported on telephones and diminishing share-numbers, Antonioni and the camera make one point after another. The agents yell at each other round the centre of the Exchange like spectators at a cock-fight; significant — is this compulsive hysteria, Bingo-like, the sporting life of atomic age non-rugby-players? The huge board of share-numbers looms above the gesticulating mob like the Moloch of a man-consumer in Lang's 'Metropolis'; significant — when non-existent money is so dominant, what chance the barbaric, simple (African) desire for natural Eden? A woman scatters salt and crosses herself and prays and swears by a pillar; significant — isn't God just another commutor computor like the rest of us?

As the realisation of ruin begins to show on the bumping, shouting, desperately empty faces, Vittoria comes again in search of her mother. In contrast with the last time we saw the girl, she is set about with feverish currents of action; crowds of people choke her movement and her speech. Her mother, when she finds her, is a small and exhausted concentration of bitterness; she has lost thousands of lire in the crash and she blames the Russians, the Socialists, and corruption in high financial circles. 'I hate to see you like this!' Vittoria cries in exasperation, but her mother, as usual, isn't listening. She disappears with a group of other victims and Vittoria is left with Piero; they go to her mother's home, where the pre 1914 design and furnishings tell us volumes, and the cupola of St. Peter's is forlornly visible from the window. In Vittoria's old bedroom the dust is thick on the furniture, the wallpaper is faded in patches, and there hangs an unlikely but intriguing picture of barbed-wire. Vittoria shows how small the bed is by lying on it — her feet stick over the end — and Piero moves quickly and automatically in for the kill. He leans over her and her smile is replaced by a look of intense uneasiness; she twists to one side and gets to her feet. They are spared the embarrassment of resuming conversation by the arrival of Vittoria's mother, who is wearily preoccupied with her lost fortune. This first intimate encounter between Vittoria and Piero balances the scene in which the voice on the telephone makes a pass at her; she is willing to be friendly but she is also intent on avoiding any deeper implication. Yet at the same time Piero is beginning to bother her because she is physically drawn to him; their gravitation towards the bed involves a subconscious seduction on her part (Piero in this scene is very passive but for the attempted kiss — like all Antonioni's menfolk he takes recourse to sex as a means of self-expression).

We next see Piero and his boss Ercoli (Louis Seigner) clearing up the human debris left in their office by the Stock Exchange storm — Piero has no sympathy whatever for the customers who are pleading for him to get their money back, but sweeps them noisily out of the door — and then we see him ditch one of his current girl-friends because he doesn't like the new colour she has dyed her hair. As they part, a priest goes by — an Antonionian, and very Italian, joke. Piero clambers into his flashy white Alfa-Romeo Giulietta Spyder Sprite and roars off in search of Vittoria's flat. She is working at the typewriter when she hears him call her, and as she did with Riccardo she hides from him, only this time in fun. She is spotted by an incoherently drunk man (Cyrus Elias) who



"... left to herself and the sunlight ..." — the scene at Verona Aero Club in 'L'Eclisse'

is wandering along the pavement and calls a greeting to her, thus revealing to Piero her whereabouts. Piero tries to get himself invited up to join her, but without success. Then the Alfa-Romeo hurtles past; the drunk has stolen it. Again any crucial development in the couple's relationship is averted by the intrusion of outside circumstances.

The following sequence begins with a long-shot of Vittoria proceeding as ever, down the middle of a road, leading in this case to the artificial lake that was built in 1960 beside the Olympic Sports Palace. Piero's car has crashed into the lake and as she arrives it is being hauled out. The body of the drunk is huddled behind the wheel, and one hand juts over the side of the car — a gruesome sight which is greatly enjoyed by the crowd that has gathered from nowhere. One of the spectators falls into the lake and there is general laughter; the only people who don't join in are Vittoria, who is horrified by the corpse, and Piero, who is annoyed about his Alfa-Romeo. The fact that he doesn't give a damn about the man who stole it is noted with concern by Vittoria, but this self-evident gulf between their characters is for the moment bridged by physical compatibility, and Vittoria gives herself up to enjoyment with only a single qualm. There is little doubt about Piero's plans for his free morning; a shot taken from his angle peers inquisitively into Vittoria's blouse just before she runs off to a lawn-sprinkling water-jet and plays with it ....

Antonioni is almost rhapsodic in these scenes of sunlight, although their sexual undercurrent flows without interruption towards Piero's next onslaught. This is preceeded by the delightful sequence (which has disappeared since the film was shown at Cannes) in which he pursues her beside a row of what look like entry-gates; the camera tracks parallel to the cavorting pair, whose voices murmur and laugh in the distance. Piero catches up with his prey as they begin to cross a street. 'At the next corner,' he says, 'I am going to kiss you'. This wipes the smile from Vittoria's face, but she continues moving, and the camera follows with a sinister track above their heads. The foliage in the trees lining the road heaves distractedly. At the half-way mark Vittoria pauses, then she advances again towards the moment she doesn't know whether to want or not.

The kiss is just a token affair. Piero tries to make it more, but Vittoria pulls away, and a passer-by is a convenient excuse to keep them apart. They arrange to meet at that same corner the next day (corners are always being used in Antonioni's films as the punctuation for relationships) and Vittoria leaves. I think it is about now that these two characters begin to be rather a drag; where 'L'Avventura' compresses the development of a relationship into a shorter space of time than it would actually require, 'L'Eclisse' takes less short-cuts with a more tenuous story-line. While this does not necessarily evoke boredom (no Antonioni sequence is ever a complete waste of time), it arouses slight impatience. Once the point has been made (in her bedroom)

that Vittoria is playing cautious, no great infringement of dramatic licence would be involved if the film proceeded straight to her downfall and its consequences. Then again, with shares tumbling about our ears and ominous vapour trails in the sky, what's this with a bird who isn't having any? Even twee-type young-love 'Sun and Shadow' did us better in the realms of nightmare-consciousness. It's good to be out in the open after the Black Hole of the Rome Borsa but a sense of claustrophobia remains, and fears still mushroom in the corners of the mind — yet Vittoria sunnily demands out attention as she tots up the points, like a Jane Austen heroine, for and against her buttons and her beaux. A further source of disaffection is Piero, played by Alain Delon 'because', says Antonioni, 'he has a hard, pitiless face'. (Albert Finney was Antonioni's first consideration for the role.) He is in the tradition of all the men in Antonion's films — lecherous, self-centred, and about as subtle as a Malkara anti-tank missile; it is just too easy for Antonioni to show us why the couple has no future together.

Vittoria arrives first the next day and when Piero turns up she agrees to go anywhere he wants — his parents' apartment is the first place he suggests. It is richly furnished, cluttered with table statuary and with earnestly traditional pictures covering the elaborate wallpaper, including a shadowy painting like the academic portraits by Otto Propheter in the 1900s. Vittoria has obviously been brought here to be impressed by all this classical good taste; confident that he can get to grips with her now she is in what he imagines to be her element, Piero encourages a playful mood and they jokingly kiss through a sheet of glass (yet another symbol). Then joke and glass are put aside and they become serious. But as Piero virtually flings her into a corner, the camera moves away from them as if they are falling; he is again in too much of a hurry, and Vittoria pushes herself free, tearing as she does so the shoulder of her dress. She doesn't look particularly upset, but she flees in search of a safety-pin, and finds herself in what was obviously Piero's old room. The Eclipse Twist plays softly on a transistor, pictures of court-cards are on the walls, and Vittoria finds a pen with pin-ups on it who can be clothed or unclothed as the holder wishes. Just how Piero likes his women. She goes on into his parents' bedroom, where everything is patterned with roses; visible from the window is the front of a church, with a group of nuns walking by and a trickle of people coming out. Vittoria turns away — nuns and churches hold no interest for her — and is caught not too seriously unawares by a triumphant Piero whom she thought she had locked out. The plush, rose-petalled darkness of the room enfolds them like an eiderdown, and beneath the portraits of the older generation the younger luxuriates in forgetfulness.

This climax, of course, doesn't solve a thing. Later, in cold daylight (the sunshine of their first, uncomplicated, hours together, has vanished completely) near the weirdly shaped indoor Olypic cycling track, Vittoria and Piero examine what is left now all the heavy breathing is out of the way. What is left is an undisguisable gulf, the presence of which Piero, like Sandro ('L'Avventura'), Aldo ('Il Grido'), and Carlo ('Le Amiche') before him, cannot understand. For he is contemplating marriage as the next step, but Vittoria is no nearer emotional capitulation than she was before her physical one. 'I don't want to be in love', she says, 'Or else I want to love you much more' In return for all his questions and demands she can only repeat 'I don't know.' Piero is trying to rush her and she is too complex a personality to be rushed. She is, as she says, 'in a foreign country' when she's with Piero. She needs patience (which he hasn't got) and she needs guidance (which he can't provide), and after all this she needs to be able to refuse him (which he would never tolerate).

They take the easiest way out. In their last scene together they make fun of their earlier ones, of themselves, of loving in general. The scene was improvised, and it has an arch frivolity that is rather irritating. Luckily it is redeemed by its last moments. Piero has to start work for the afternoon, and as Vittoria says goodbye at the office door they cling to each other with a sudden change of mood. They promise to meet tomorrow, and tomorrow, and all the next days, and that evening at eight. But in the hard radioactive glare coming through the opaque window beside them they look sad, and they look empty, and they look lonely, and there is no health in them. Vittoria goes slowly down the office stairs and into the street where society in the form of two pedestrians promptly cannons into her. In his office, Piero goes thoughtfully round putting all the telephones back on their hooks, where they at once burst into raucous song like so many crows. He seats himself in their midst and with an expression of mild resignation he gently shakes his head. A mushroom-shaped lamp is on his table. As we see the last of Vittoria, her expression too is one of not unhappy resignation; then she walks out of the shot and the camera shows us a jungle of placid foliage above her head.

The final sequence of 'L'Eclisse', six (originally seven) minutes of shots of (among other things) the places the 'lovers' have visited during their wanderings in the sun, serves as many pur-

poses as one likes to detect in it. Antonioni's version in this: 'The seven minutes have been called abstract, but this is not really so. All of the objects that I show have a significance. These are seven minutes where only the objects remain of the adventure; the town, material life, has devoured the living beings.' On my first viewing of 'L'Eclisse' it seemed to me that Antonioni was quite plainly confirming all the hints of imminent holocaust that have appeared during the film, emphasised by shots in this last montage in which people point at jet-planes in the sky, and a man reads a newspaper with the headline 'La gara atomica'. The blaze of a street lamp in close-up seemed a very definite reason why Piero and Vittoria would never meet again. After more visits I am not so sure, although I don't regard the dusk as a genuine eclipse — it is too obviously the descent of night upon the corner rendez-vous (the water-jet is turned off for the night, the street-lamps come on, etc.). Just before the end there is a shot of the uncompleted building by the corner, lit by a solitary lamp at the front; it looks primitive, a mud hut, yet deserted, ominous, waiting. I think it summarises most of all, with the terrifying glare that follows what is at the restless heart of the film.

'L'Eclisse' is constructed with such care that to do it half the justice it deserves each shot would have to be analysed by the square inch, and each sequence would require a complete chapter to describe its multitude of meanings. And when a couple of volumes had been filled with the manner and the matter and the magnificence of 'L'Eclisse', still the flavour of it could not be transformed into words. Yet while it is in this respect everything a film should be, while it brings to the cinema everything a film should bring, 'L'Eclisse' has replaced the desperation of 'L'Avventura' and 'La Notte' by a bleak calm, a suspension of feeling that has about it the whiff of stagnation. Antonioni says of Vittoria and Piero: 'In that they are more adapted to their emotional emptiness than my preceeding characters, they are truly modern.' He makes a beautifully persuasive case equating defeatism with modernity, but I don't think I believe him.

L'AVVENTURA and LA NOTTE:
the triumph and the peak

THE lassitude of 'L'Eclisse', involving a negation of sentiments amounting to emotional suicide, is a logical conclusion for the women of the trilogy to have reached. It is, indeed, a happy ending of sorts. Vittoria and Piero, shielded by irresponsibility, enjoy themselves more than do any other couple in Antonioni's films. But 'L'Eclisse' as a whole does not move us as 'L'Avventura' and 'La Notte' move us, perhaps because, in Antonioni's words, 'It's a story of the future'. By comparison with Vittoria's sterility of feeling the other two heroines of the trilogy are sentimental in a truly old-fashioned way. Claudia of 'L'Avventura' has, in particular, all the naivety and urgent enthusiasm which Vittoria has lost. She is initially, in appearance as well as by nature, a twentieth century equivalent of nineteenth century Romantic ideal —

> 'A perfect Woman, nobly planned,
> To warn, to comfort and command;
> And yet a Spirit still, and bright
> With something of angelic light.'

Beside her two descendents, whose spirits flicker with far less confidence Claudia appears so lacking in cynicism, so apparently unaccustomed (for her early twenties) to the ways of the male, so unprepared for the collapse of her illusions, so conscientious and yet so certain in her conscientiousness, that she seems totally inexplicable. She combines the idealism of the adolescent with the capability of the adult; in the hard ethics of loving she seems inexperienced — but in its practical aspects she seems able to warn, comfort, and command like a veteran the man she falls for.

Where does Claudia come from? About her background we only ever learn that it was poorer than her present environment. About her emotional past we know nothing, except that we are expected to swallow the several conflicting results it has had upon her character: (1) she is unattached at the beginning of the film (the only person she has a conscience about when she becomes involved with Sandro is her friend Anna), and since she shows no sign of Vittoria's disenchantment we must assume the outrageously unlikely fact that no man has snapped up Claudia before now; (2) she counters the attacks by Sandro with a sophistication that speaks of long practice — notably in the train sequence ('Don't wait for the train to leave, and don't look so tragic'), when she forces him to leave her alone; (3) when she (suddenly) gives way to her feelings for Sandro she is raptuous as if the joy of it were new to her — yet she is uninhibited about sharing a hotel bedroom

with him; (4) she is as shattered that he betrays her as she is that they both betrayed Anna — her tears accept the justice of his infidelity, while at the same time expressing her bewilderment at the whole situation (if there have been other men in her life, what, on this evidence, are we to conclude happened to them?); and (5) she doesn't walk out on him, which to judge again from the train sequence she should have been strong enough to do, but with the humility of a saint and the weakness of a sentimentalist she makes her gesture of forgiveness. Claudia is in fact an imaginary being, the kind of nobly planned 'perfect Woman' that every man likes to think he's got his hands on, her rich collation of classical beauty, elastic devotion, and maternal understanding is Antonioni's interpretation of the illusory standards of everyday life. In that the trilogy shows the destruction of these standards, Claudia is its first and most complex symbol for the decline and fall of conventional womanhood.

If we believe in her it is because she represents what we have been indoctrinated since birth to believe in. She is, moreover, performed by Monica Vitti. 'No other actress inspires me like Monica, or is as sympathetic to what I want, without her, I don't know how I could have made 'L'Avventura' — nobody else would have been right.' Thanks to her vitality, Antonioni was shaken from the assumption made by his previous film, 'Il Grido', that love and death are synonymous, and reverted instead to the conviction of 'Le Amiche' that woman's power of endurance is almost inexhaustible despite her tragic suffering at the hands of man — an upward step changed to abound by his leading lady. Monica Vitti was to have trouble with Vittoria ('I have never seen a girl like this, a young girl who can say "It isn't necessary to know each other to love, and perhaps it isn't even necessary to love" — I don't know what the look, the walk, or the voice of such a girl is like.'), but with Claudia, for all that she springs fully-fledged from a poet's dream, the actress was in more familiar territory. It has, after all, echoes of Tolstoy and of Dostoievsky, of Thomas Hardy's long-suffering heroines, and on a different plane again of Van Druten and Tennessee Williams — for Antonioni too is talking about people eating each other. She made her part, and with it the film, a triumph for Antonioni.

The film that made the names simultaneously of Michelangelo Antonioni and Monica Vitti was shot under difficulties which would have crushed a director less accustomed to a career of setbacks. In September 1959 he set out with his team for Lisca Bianca — his first use of Southern Italy as the setting for a film. The Sicilian island scenes of 'L'Avventura' took four months to shoot, during which time Antonioni has to cope with troubles of all kinds. He found himself abandoned on an island without money or news from his producers, often forced to use his cast as amateur technicians, while the arrival of winter made working and living conditions almost impossible. And at the end of all the hardship the film was received at Cannes with jeers and contempt from much of its audience.

Although the brilliance of 'L'Avventura' was immediately recognised by many critics (thirty-five of whom placed on record at Cannes their admiration for its 'exceptional importance'), the film still has plenty of detractors, objecting to everything from its length to its innocuous love-scenes. For myself, while there are parts of 'L'Avventura' I have come to dislike intensely (the interrogation of the smuggler suspects, the overheard train conversation, the Gloria Perkins riot, the sinister men at Noto, the improvised bell-ringing, and details like Giulia tripping around in her clownish collar or Patrizia waking up in the early morning — these are things which strike me as mishandled, or facile, or plain wrong), the film has always had the disquieting, inveigling, inexhaustible fascination of a true work of art. I regret that for the purposes of this monograph, in which I shall want to examine Antonioni's earlier films in some detail, I am unable to devote the amount of space I could wish to the analysis of 'L'Avventura' and of 'La Notte'; that they are his best known films at this time will serve, I hope, as some justification for so drastic a curtailment. Instead, I will confine myself to a few points which I feel have not been brought out sufficiently in the wealth of material published about them in this country.

'L'Avventura' is not as flashy as 'L'Eclisse', but it is constructed with the same intricacy; and words, gestures, positions, backgrounds are similarly packed with significance. The creak of a spring, the bending straight of a blade of grass, the trying on of a wig, the upsetting of an ink bottle, the closing of shutters — each fragment has its place in the mosaic of meaning. The limelight of 'L'Avventura' is usually taken, for obvious reasons, by the delectable Claudia, but what is also notable about the film is that it traces very carefully the parallel development of Sandro's character. His insensitive conduct doesn't command a great deal of sympathy but it is shown with subtlety by Antonioni to be perfectly logical. At his first appearance in the film, waving confidently from his window to the girls who most appropriately have to look up to him from below, Sandro exudes mascu-

line superiority. The unexpected ill-humour of his fiancée is quickly explained for him by her move towards the bed, shedding clothes; he concedes to her invitation (or perhaps on Anna's part it is resignation) with bland and superficial understanding of her physical need for him, and doesn't see as we do her look of near-hatred as they lie there. Sandro, in fact, is eager and easy to please in a very conventional way. His first action after greeting her on the boat next morning is to read his newspaper, but when she complains he cheerfully throws it overboard (note here a hint of Claudia's less extravagant upbringing — she makes an almost involuntary gesture of disapproval at the waste). When Anna is supposedly attacked by a shark Sandro swims immediately with gratifying solicitude to the rescue. He is therefore understandably sulky when Anna asserts on the island that she doesn't feel the same about him; he tries to soothe (but not comprehend) her with the rather flat-footed comment: 'You're just going through a period of readaptation — we'll have plenty of time to sort things out when we're married.' He even tries a crude joke, but Anna is plainly not in the mood; he shrugs, and sensibly, as he, sees it, leaves her to cool off by herself. So Anna, who has told Claudia 'the summer's over' a key remark, and told Sandro she wants to be on her own for 'a month, perhaps a year', cuts out; there is the sound, possibly the sight, of a boat, and she has gone. (As Antonioni once remarked: 'Someone told me she committed suicide, but I don't believe it.') She is not, as is so often claimed, forgotten. The memory, the look, the character of Anna haunts the entire film, and Sandro never abandons his search for her — even the available charms of Gloria Perkins at the end of the film balance those of Anna at the beginning.

It is not until Claudia has put on Anna's shirt, thus assuming (like Alain Delon in 'Plein Soleil') the identity of her friend, that Sandro begins to display an interest in her. During the island search, Antonioni has separated Claudia and Sandro both in terms of distance and in terms of camera; Sandra leaves several shots just before Claudia enters them. Now the couple is linked together, beginning with the dawn shot of Claudia in Anna's shirt walking towards Sandro. Once their hands have touched by accident when she stumbles, and Sandro has detected a slight response from her (confirmed for us by Claudia's defensive outbreak to Patrizia on his behalf: 'He didn't sleep a wink all night!'), a kiss, for which he happily takes the initiative, is inevitable. Sandro needs a woman around for his own peace of mind; free from his slightly domineering fiancée he seeks a more docile replacement. Claudia, as the train journey shows, won't be giving in without a struggle, so Sandro tricks her into chasing him by arranging that a newspaper article about Anna's rumoured itinerary should be prominently reprinted — so that Claudia would read it, follow it up, and find him waiting (which is what that obscure little scene with the journalist Zuria in Messina is all about). Having got her, he settles down to receiving her full attention on the grass; the scene is neat restaging of his first session with Anna.

We learn more about Sandro's profession as he contemplates the magnificent baroque churches in Noto; he is an architect's surveyor (ironic that Anna should have said: 'Why must you always ruin everything?'), and he dreams of returning to creative independence as an architect in his own right. Claudia is quick to encourage him: 'I know you could build beautiful things.' — but Sandro, who isn't so sure, returns hurriedly to the more manageable subject of matrimony. Next day he goes out as Claudia is getting dressed (her ecstatic mood has no effect on him at all), to imbibe culture at the local Museum. It is shut. Beside it a young architect (Gianni Arduini) is being enviably constructive. Frustrated, Sandro hurries back to the hotel, shuts out all the architecture visible from his window, and launches himself at Claudia in order to recapture some self-respect. But she has become elusive, like Anna, and instead of submitting to him she reclaims her independence by ordering a renewal of the search. There follows the extremely Freudian shot of their car moving down a slope and curve in the road.

At Taormina Claudia is uneasy among all the crowds at the hotel where they are meeting Patrizia and her husband Ettore, the architect Sandro has to break with if he is to start being creative; the crowds, however, don't worry Sandro, who is used to them. Claudia retreats to bed, but he dresses to go down and mingle, cheerfully describing as he puts his shirt on how money has corrupted him: 'I used to dream of being a diplomat — can you see me as one of those? Never pictured myself becoming rich; I was going to be a genius in a garret. Now I've got two flats and I've neglected to become a genius. What do you think of that?' Claudia's reply is as illuminating as Sandro's self-description: 'I could say a lot about it, but not just now'. Anna may have gone but a dictator is still around, planning Sandro's future for him, allowing him sexual superiority only in limited doses, controlling him, dominating him. 'Tell me you love me,' — *now* she wants it, after having resisted him earlier. And so Sandro, jam-packed with frustrations which are increased when Ettore doesn't let him get a word in

sideways — 'See you tomorrow for those estimates, then!' — wanders through hotel rooms full of couples arguing and John Francis Lane propping up the furniture, until he finds a woman who loves without strings attached. Gloria Perkins, even then, requires cash next morning. The man just hasn't a chance. He weeps beside Claudia and the ruined church and the rustling foliage because he has betrayed her and himself and Anna, and because he knows he is too weak to have done anything but precisely what he has done. Far from being the cheery, untroubled lover-man of his first appearance, he has revealed himself as someone cheap, unreliable and pathetic — the glamorous facade has been shattered. In the last shot of the film Claudia's half of the screen has a dormant volcano in the distance, but Sandro is faced with a blank wall.

The tears shed by Sandro are the deepest sign of masculine emotion in all Antonioni's films. Giovanni Pontano in 'La Notte' goes through a similar enlightment as to his own inadequacies, but at the end he is refusing, unlike Sandro, to accept their implications. He burrows into sexual aggression with the obvious intention of hiding there, and tears (or, indeed, laughter) seem to have been long lost in the cobweb gloom of his married past. 'La Notte' is the peak of Antonioni's work in the cinema because with pitiless accuracy it exposes every aching nerve of the dying marriage of Giovanni and Lidia and makes us squirm with both the victims. For their problem is the ruinous, soul-destroying, love-destroying one of habitual disenchantment; they trifle tentatively with infidelity not because they have got to the stage, like Corrado and Guilia in 'L'Avventura', of irritating each other intensely, but because they are desperately bored together and yet cannot remain apart. 'La Notte' has a very formal structure punctuated by senses in which they are independent and in which they are dependent upon each other. Arriving to see Tommaso they are together (although the icy silence in the lift immediately establishes the temperature of their relationship); then Giovanni has his picturesque encounter with the nymphomaniac, whose cries turn into those of Lidia, desolately alone outside. They are together again for the traffic-jam and the arrival at the reception where Giovanni's new book 'La Stagione' is being launched; then Lidia goes off on her own and wanders round a decrepit courtyard — a delicate sequence including the eloquent shot of her hand, wedding-ring prominent, picking rust from a wall. Giovanni looks for her at their flat and is uneasy because he can't find her; meanwhile she has a series of encounters, including being pursued by the winner of a street fight (who is the equivalent for her of the nymphomaniac for Giovanni), and the symbolic but heavy-handed rocket-launching scene. She telephones her husband to come and join her and they get into nostalgic mood (by an abandoned church) while strolling round the area they frequented in what were presumably happier days.

Lidia's success in thereby extracting some animation from Giovanni encourages her to suggest a quiet evening out; she hopes to sustain their feeling of intimacy while avoiding boredom. She is deliberately provocative by getting him to help her as she has a bath, but Giovanni merely treats her as if she were a towel-rail. The floor-show they visit, ostensibly to arouse Giovanni's interest in the female form, leaves him (understandably) cold. So they go to a party, where by showing him off she perhaps hopes to be proud of him. Again the crowd of people splits them up. Giovanni is swept off by fans of one sort or another and Lidia wanders on her own, endeavouring to avoid an old school friend. Husband and wife meet briefly and she mentions Valentina, the girl she has seen reading Hermann Broch's 'The Sleepwalkers'. As if this were a form of invitation (the girl sounds unusual), Giovanni goes and joins Valentina and begins the kind of transitory liaison that seems to flourish briefly at all dreary functions of this nature.

Alone in black shadows, Lidia phones the hospital to enquire after Tommaso; she learns he has just died. The death of this friend who meant so much to her is followed by another numbing blow; from her elevated position as if removed from reality, she looks down through the building (a Bietti construction of fine concrete and glass) to the floor below, where her husband drifts into an unimpassioned kiss with Valentina. Giovanni follows his first voluntary gesture of independence by another, when he refuses to be bought by his host (Valentina's father), an industrialist who wants a tame writer to do a history of his firm. Lidia, her expression crying out for help, tries later to speak to him about Tommaso, about themselves, but Giovanni ignores her and pursues Valentina — who has discovered with a shock that he is married and is hiding from him. Lidia's own attempt at infidelity, as forlorn a venture as that of her husband, is the consequence of her suppressed grief; there is a downpour (useful as a symbol for tears, and therefore much welcomed by everybody), and she is about to join the people plunging into the swimming pool when she is firmly collected by Roberto, who has a mouth like the nymphomaniac's and has been shadowing Lidia all evening. We see them talking animatedly but inaudibly in his car as it moves slowly through the hissing rain; she

"...pushing Giovanni back to his wife when the long night is over..." Valentina, Lidia, and Giovanni in 'La Notte'.

obviously has the chance to emulate her husband's behaviour, but the only words we hear in this self-conscious but effective scene are hers, as she realises: 'I'm sorry, I can't.' Back at the house, Giovanni has been thwarted by Valentina ('I draw the line at home-wrecking'), who, like everyone else he meets during the film, has got on to asking his rather jaded opinion about literary matters (he has earlier said: 'I no longer have original thoughts — just a memory.').

Valentina is the first of what could be termed Antonioni's 'new women'. Younger than Vittoria ('eighteen, and many, many months' is how she puts it), she has the same unfathomable detachment from her parents, from love ('each time I have tried to communicate with someone, love disappears'), from any kind of self-committal. She just avoids being a blueprint for the heroine of 'L'Eclisse' only in that she has an adolescent mania for brooding about her unhappiness; she would be like a disillusioned Claudia, were she not so lacking in vitality. 'Too much talk takes the meaning out of words' — the thought is voiced in 'L'Avventura' (and in Godard's 'Vivre sa vie'), and in Valentina it is personified; for her the meaning has gone from most actions as well. She invents a game for herself, from which she can extract a transitory and meaningless sense of involvement; she makes up her own unimportant rules because those of other people don't matter either. She plays a recording of herself reading a piece she has written and rewinds it as a nonsensical gabble. Yet we aren't really given the chance to know Valentina very well; we have to take her severe maladjustment at face value, despite Monica Vitti's industrious performance ('His characters are difficult, all hidden in a fog — often I have to make an enormous effort in order to be able to act them.') She is, in fact, a means Antonioni has used for dramatic purposes of pushing Giovanni back to his wife when the long night is over; once the nymphomaniac scene has disposed of the usual forces which subject a marriage to strain, Valentina is the only kind of creation who could conceivably provoke both a marital crisis and a reunion in an extremely compressed period of time.

Finally together again, Lidia and Giovanni sort out what has become apparent about themselves through Valentina and through the death of Tommaso. 'The conversation in the final scene,' says Antonioni, 'which is really a soliloquy, a monologue by the wife, is a kind of summing up of the film, to clarify the meaning of what took place.' It is a harrowing scene, in which we learn not only just how like that of Madame Bovary, Lidia's married life has been, but also how much has been lost from what was once, to judge from the letter she reads, an idyllic and near-perfect love-affair. Questions simmer in the mind about the Pontano lack of children, about the apparent cause of their emotional impotence — the choking wealth in which they live; but there can be no question about the terrible void in which they realise themselves to be lost without trace. Lidia is ready to capitulate, but Giovanni tries to dissuade her with words (which of course have no meaning), and with the brute force of physical love. The camera steals away and leaves them grappling in the cold dawn; the ending was intended by the producers to be optimistic, but there is no comfort in anything it says or shows. There is only the feeling, stronger and more urgent than anywhere else in the trilogy, of an emptiness akin to death. It hurts. I recently came across a remark by Bunuel with a very Antonionian ring: 'I prefer to use natural settings in my films because it is part of the characters — it acts upon them.' It gives rise to various tempting comparisons between these directors. And foremost is the thought that Lidia, like Claudia before her, is akin to Viridiana....

THE PRELIMINARIES

THE trilogy was begun ten years after Antonioni's first feature film. It was the culmination of a remarkable decade. From the beginning, Antonioni's subjects were unusual in the Italian, or indeed in any, context, and their distance from the conventional increases progressively as he purified both his style and his ideas. With his films up to 'Le Amiche', Antonioni visibly disposes of a clutter of influences which had accumulated from work with Carné and from the study of foreign films in general. What could not so easily be shaken off was his association with the writers and directors whose reactionary Socialism brooded in the shadow of Mussolini. Even for a man of Antonioni's independent and isolated disposition, the climate of war and of attendant neo-realism in the arts inevitably pervaded his manner of thought. Although his rather detached humanism, and his strong individual ideas concerning the manipulation of actors and of film, established from the start that his treatment of the cinema was going to be out of the ordinary, Antonioni has never lost the subconscious scars of his first thirty years' ordeal in Italian insecurity.

These scars are revealed not by his token allegiances towards neo-realism but by his consistent Marxism. As Brecht put Marx into verse, Antonioni may be said to have put Marx into film. His characters are constantly enmeshed in the web of class distinction, which, inhibiting their emotional freedom, grows more suffocating as they struggle against it. With the exception of 'Il Grido' (in which, less directly, an upper-class attitude grapples with a working-class ethos and shakes the sense of the film), Antonioni's anti-capitalism follows a clear course from 'Cronaca di un Amore' to 'L'Eclisse'. In 'Cronaca' and 'Le Amiche', social disparity destroys two possible loves; in 'I Vinti', 'Signora senza Camelie', 'La Notte', and 'L'Eclisse', the pursuit or possession of money destroys happiness. Ironically, even in success, Antonioni himself is plagued by financial worries; 'in common with Bergman, I have only melancholy, a fidelity to my ideas, and the lack of money'. In his fidelity to his ideas lies his greatness as an artist; like his melancholy and his lack of money, it has been with him throughout his career.

Michelangelo Antonioni was born on the 29th September, 1912 at Ferrara where he spent his childhood. His first manifestation of talent (at about the age of ten) was in his drawings, which were usually not of people but of 'portals, cornices, and plans for absurd buildings'. He then progressed to the construction of whole towns of cardboard, sparsely populated with small figures whose destinies he controlled. From the age of fourteen he took up oil-painting; his subjects were portraits, in anticipation of his films. 'But what contributed most to my becoming the director that I am was my upbringing in a bourgeois milieu; it gave me a predilection for certain themes, certain problems, certain conflicts, sentimental or psychological.' Other children being his social inferiors as a result of his well-to-do family background, he developed even at an early age a consciousness of the influences of class distinction and a certain dislike of the barriers erected by wealth. At Bologna university, where he took his degree, he came across some new concerns: 'I began by studying classics, but I fell for a girl who was at the Technical Institute, so I went there too. Afterwards I took a course in Economy and Commerce for my degree, and made some effort to learn the business of higher mathematics which, today, is very useful to me.'

At this time, Antonioni became further drawn into the theatre, another of his childhood interests. He helped to set up a student company, and directed productions of Pirandello, of Ibsen, and of some comedies written by himself. He also published his first articles in the local paper ('Il Corriere Padano'), became a tennis champion, and began writing criticism of films as well as of the fascist regime under which they were being made. Discernible in his work was a strong and poetic sympathy with humanity and its manner of living. Just before he left Ferrara and the grey North of his youth, he wrote a reflection on 'Men of the Night', in which he described with the nostalgia of a young Rousseau and the affection of a Wordsworth, the merits of peasantry. It contrasts oddly with 'Il Grido', but is greatly in the mood of his short fillms; some remarks also anticipate the themes of the trilogy.

Antonioni was twenty-seven when he reached Rome in 1940. He had endeavoured to shoot a 16mm documentary on the subject of a lunatic asylum without success (as he often described) but with a strong impact upon himself. Otherwise, he had nothing to support his desire to make films beyond a pile of journalism and an unflinching determination. He accepted a job on the preparation of the Universal Exhibition. Mussolini's flamboyant and never-to-be-used collection of architectural eccentricities, but left after two months rather than waste his time. (He was to return twenty years later to the site, now favoured by film-directors — Fellini made there his episode in 'Boccaccio 70', as well as

a fine balance between the human and the atmospheric . . .' — a scene from 'N.U.'

some of 'La Dolce Vita' — to make his most imposing comments on futility, with 'L'Eclisse'.) Out of work, Antonioni found himself in severe straits. 'Not one of those I thought to be my friends offered me a hand. For some months I was truly alone. I would not go running back to my father, because he would certainly have wanted me to stay at Ferrara, where there were jobs important enough but not of a kind to interest me. So I had to solve my problems myself. Rome is a difficult city, hostile. I passed some hellish months, literally starving. Once, I even stole a beef-steak, I'm not ashamed to admit it...'

When he finally entered the Rome Experimental Centre, Antonioni spent only three months there; 'the technical side of the cinema in itself has never interested me; once the two or three rules of cinematography have been learned, nothing much remains but to break them'. He then made a very short film of which he was quite proud; apparently it consisted of a single panning shot (actually two joined together) and involved two characters, both played by the same actress. The writing of scenarios followed, including work on 'Un Pilota Ritorna' with Rossellini, and on 'I Due Foscari' with Enrico Fulchignoni, who took Antonioni as his assistant. He next represented the Scalera company on 'Les Visiteurs du Soir', an opportunity to work with Marcel Carné which he, but not Carné, was delighted about. Nervous of the French director, Antonioni hadn't the courage to clarify his supposed position as co-director and was subjected throughout the shooting to various indignities. Although he would nevertheless have liked to make the most of his stay in France, military service commitments forced him back to Rome.

Antonioni's first documentary, made in the winter of 1942-3 when he was thirty, was sponsored, after much persuasion on his part and much hesitation on theirs, by the LUCE National Institute. The subject, at that time a delicate and rather daring one, was the existence led by the human flotsam on the banks of the river Pô. The script by Antonioni was a composite of ideas he had earlier written for 'Cinema', which he at one time edited (along with De Santis and Lizzani). Here he had described the Pô as 'ranging from very large arms, broad as lakes and sometimes interrupted by little islands, to the narrow passages where wild plants crowd the banks like an African landscape; ill-constructed hovels lean against the dykes, an eternal swamp in the little yards at their entrance; and small twentieth century villas, each with its 'chalet' at the water's edge, grow lively on certain evenings with light, syncopated music . . . . The sons of the Pô, despite everything, have never managed to break away from the river. They have struggled and suffered, they will struggle and suffer again; but obviously to them suffering is in the natural order of things and it has no capacity to spur them on, to make them fight.' Called 'Gente del Pô', the documentary had as its linking subject the voyage of a barge, part of a small convoy, down-river to the estuary — where, huddled in shacks of straw, fishermen and their families live on the mud-flats. Antonioni went to his home-town with a small team to make the film, shot it in a month, and despatched the result back to Rome to be dev-

eloped. As he later said, 'Gente del Pô' was something completely new in the documentary line; it was groping unknowingly in the same direction as 'Ossessione', which Visconti made at the same time, and it dealt with men and not with objects.

Again Antonioni's beginning in the cinema was frustrated. While 'Gente del Pô' was being processed, Italy was occupied by the Germans, Mussolini was released from prison where the Allies had put him, and a new fascist state was declared. Antonioni found himself scraping a living by translating Gide and Chateaubriand, writing film criticism for the illegal anti-fascist paper 'L'Italia Libera', and selling the medals he had won at tennis. When he at last caught up with his film stock he found that at least half of it (mainly the sections that had been the most violent in their observations) had been ruined in the developing process, probably by intention. In 1947, he put together what was left. It was a fragmentary collection of images.

Even so, Antonioni had made sufficient of a reputation for himself as a critic (in 'L'Italia Libera', 'Film d'Oggi', 'Film Rivista', and 'Cinema') as well as a scenarist (he worked on two projects with Visconti, and collaborated on 'Caccia Tragica' with De Santis) to be able to make use of 'Gente del Pô' in its final (1,000 ft.) form. On the strength of his first documentary he was able to find backing for his second, a study of an entirely different group of people — the street-cleaners of Rome. 'Nettezza Urbana' ('N. U.') shows the cleaners at work from dawn until dusk, when, the city swept, they take the train home. Photographed with delicacy, the film maintained a fine balance between the human and the atmosphere. While scarcely as lyrical as, for instance, the British documentaries by Jennings and his contemporaries, it had a rather similar irony of tone, and its insight on city ways had the dryness of the Antonioni to come. There was some trouble with the soundtrack, about which he already had strong ideas; he wanted to use a Bach prelude played on the saxophone but his producers refused to allow such sacrilege. So the film was accompanied by Bach on the piano, and jazz on the saxophone — composed by Giovanni Fusco, the musican who has worked on all but two of Antonioni's subsequent pictures.

The partnership between the director and the composer has been a strange but rewarding one. Giovanni Fusco, under the discipline both of himself and of Antonioni, has become the best composer in the cinema today. 'L'Avventura' in particular is exquisitely orchestrated; every note of it is perfection at every hearing. Yet, as can be seen from his remarks on the subject in my selection of quotations at the end of this monograph, Antonioni regards music as superfluous — his images say everything he feels is necessary. In the Leprohon book on Antonioni, Fusco explains how this attitude is reconciled with his own work as a musician. 'The soundtrack of a film must be very incisive and deliberate. Long experience has taught me that the best results can be obtained with the smallest orchestra. For myself, particularly when working with a director of Antonioni's scope, I dispense with an orchestra altogether and for a number of years now I have used only small groups. In 'I Vinti' I simply had a piano; in 'Cronaca' I used a single saxophone. I thought I had reached the limit in thus reducing music to the very skeleton, but Antonioni wanted to go further — to abolish it altogether or to tolerate it only if essential (as, for instance, in a dance scene).

'The music I compose for him puts him into a disconcertingly nervous state. He follows and supervises the course of its composition beside me at the piano, interminably asking for repetitions and discussions, always discontented, always despairing, always uneasy. A man of extreme culture (it is as well to remember he has also studied music and even at one time played the violin), he is ruled by incessant doubts . . . He has an intelligence so keen it encloses him in profound solitude. — It sometimes seems to me that he has to make a real effort to hear what is said to him. Despite this, our collaboration always works out for the best. I have to agree to numerous sacrifices when working with him; I am often to be heard pleading, almost bitterly, for the scraps I have composed. But I am sure I have succeeded on occasion in leading him into certain areas of poetry and making him accept them *musically*, without having any doubts.'

Antonioni's next short film was 'L'Amorosa Menzogna' (1948-9), which dealt with the comic strips called 'fumetti'. Long before satirists got started on the idea, these were photographs with added captions; they unfolded banal stories of a romantic and exotic nature, and starred personalities who were idolised like film-stars. True to form, Antonioni showed the unappetising reality beneath all the glamour, but with a conciliatory rather than cynical treatment. His film investigated the very ordinary models and publishers dependent upon the 'fumetti', as well as the customers who bought them. Again, it was an unusual approach for its time; 'I made the film entirely in a popular tone, there is nothing aristocratic about it — although this was the time of the formal splendour of the documentaries on painting by Emmer and Gras; their coldness, detachment, pointillism, was not for me.' From 'L'Amorosa Menzogna' was

"... qualities today specifically associated with Antonioni ..." — Guido and Paola gloomily face opposite directions in 'Cronaca di un Amore'

drawn the idea for 'Lo Sceicco Bianco', which Antonioni wrote four years later in collaboration with Tullio Pinelli, and Frederico Fellini who directed.

The next short was 'Superstizione', an enquiry into practices which, although banned by law, were still maintained in some rural areas. To make the film, Antonioni went to a little village near Camerino, where he endeavoured by devious means to discover the facts behind rumours of witchcraft and to approach the supposed sorcerers themselves. His activities were cut short when he was summoned back to Rome by his producers, who were nervous about the whole venture, and as a result 'Superstizione' was an incomplete assemblage of material — little better than a series of short observations. He had more fortune with the conventional documentary which followed in the same year (1949), which dealt with the making of Rayon. Called 'Sette Canne, un Vestito', it was filmed at Torviscosa, a village near Trieste. For a change, Antonioni showed more interest with the machinery than with the people, although the film did not sever itself completely (like Resnais' 'Chant du Styrène') from the factory workers, or eulogise the cellulose plants to the exclusion of their controllers. It was put together with great precision and an almost impersonal style. Next was 'La Villa dei Mostri', the short which followed; there was nevertheless a notable similarity in ideas in both films. The latter dealt with sculptures designed by the proprietor of the Orsini villa at Bomarzo (near Viterbo), who used for the purpose stones fallen from a mountain. These statues were scattered in gay abandon about the villa gardens, with something of the incongruity, if not the phallicism, of the weird monoliths in Sweden's Vigeland Park. They portrayed monstrous anthropomorphic forms through which Antonioni wandered with his cameraman; the result was a film expressing much the same feeling towards the statues as was expressed towards the machines in 'Sette Canne' — an inference of their latent menace. The two films attracted some attention to Antonioni and he was offered several subjects; he agreed to do a documentary on the cable-car which connects Cortina d'Ampezzo and Monte Faloria, although the theme did not greatly appeal to him. He went to Cortina, set himself up on the roof of the cable-car and endeavoured to capture on film his impressions of the emptiness around him. But again he found his budget was reduced; sooner than waste time on something unsatisfactory, he returned to Rome. The documentary, 'La Funivia del Faloria' was, as a result, a rather meagre collection of very bleak shots, Antonionian in little more than their sense of isolation.

In 1950, as today, Antonioni was in the position of being able to film whichever scripts he chose out of the subjects proposed to him. In 1950, as today, the only scripts he wanted

to film were his own. He was particularly quick to drop 'Funivia' because he had written the scenario for a feature film and wanted to get someone to finance it; his documentaries had won him a reputation as well as some prizes, and his chances of finding a producer were good. He discovered a man in Turin, who was prepared to put up money for a feature; when Antonioni described to him the story of 'Cronaca di un Amore' the man's enthusiasm waned, but he gave Antonioni the chance to talk him round. 'I suppose the hours I spent talking to him in his hotel room were some of the most difficult in my life. I talked non-stop for four or five hours — those who know me will know how hard that was for me, accustomed as I am to silence. I had before me an unknown face. I did not know how to talk. My words produced expressions I could not gauge. At last, he told me that he still didn't think much of the subject, but he could see what I felt about it and that was good enough.' So it was that in 1950 at the age of thirty-eight, Michelangelo Antonioni began his first feature film.

'Cronaca di un Amore' has little of a first attempt about its appearance. It is a completely assured work, which states immediately problems Antonioni has never since ceased to explore. Unlike his contemporaries, he set his film in a rich milieu, and he used professional actors at a time when non-professionals were all the neo-realist rage. While interestingly in keeping with the Italian guilt-complex as defined independently at the same time by Curzio Malaparte, 'Cronaca' had a preoccupation with guilt which otherwise set it aside from the Italian cinema of the 1950s (although 'Ossessione' had perhaps established a precedent). The reason for Antonioni's particular concern at this point with a subject only treated in detail again (and without the same intensity) in 'L'Avventura', is perhaps best sought in his unconventional training. As was remarked in 'Cahiers du Cinéma' when 'Cronaca' first appeared, the film is thick with discernible influences, not simply of Bresson and of Pabst, of Welles and of Carné, but more fundamentally of the Dashiell Hammett code of intrigue, crime, detection, and penalty. Huston's 'Maltese Falcon', Wilder's 'Double Indemnity' and 'Lost Weekend', Edward Dmytryk's 'Murder my Sweet' — these were the links between 'Cronaca' and Dostoievsky, and if Paola has the plumage of another Louise Brooks she also has the lethal sensuality of another Rita Hayworth or Lauren Bacall.

The film deals with the compulsive affinity tethering Paola (Lucia Bosè) to Guido (Massimo Girotti). Seven years ago, students together, they could have prevented a lift accident which killed Guido's fiancée, Giovanna. Her death had been what they were longing for, but its occurence haunted them and they parted. Paola then married a Milanese industrialist, Fontana (Ferdinando Sarmi), but the marriage has not been a great success. At the start of the film he is hiring a private detective to investigate his wife's activities. In fact, Paola has been faithful to him, but the enquiries made by the detective attract the attention of Guido, now a car-salesman, and he moves to Milan and becomes involved with her again. They meet secretly in places which (as with the Rosetta-Lorenzo affair in 'Le Amiche') have a cheapness and lack of privacy that is disheartening. Paola finally suggests that the only way they can make a future together is by killing her husband, thus securing his money to keep her in the luxury to which she is accustomed, while setting her free to enjoy it with the man she wants.

Guido takes a lot of persuading, but at last he agrees. Fontana is to be shot as he is driving by his usual route home. One evening, Guido cycles to a bridge where Fontana's car always has to slow down, and he waits there for it to arrive. Earlier in the day, Fontana has been given the report on his wife by the private detective, who may or may not have discovered her new association with Guido — a scene in which he follows Paola ends with her tricking him by going to her hairdresser. Perhaps by accident, perhaps by intention after reading the report, Fontana crashes his car not far from Guido and is killed. The story of Giovanna, thus repeated, produces the same result as before. Guido sees the body and at once prepares to leave Milan; Paola avoids the police in panic when they come to tell her of her husband's death, and she arrives as Guido is about to go. He tells her: 'I feel that now we can't go on', and he disappears by taxi into the night; he has promised to telephone, but everything is clearly over between them.

The derivative morality which brings to Paola her deserts does not, however, destroy her identity as an Antonioni woman. She is the most conventionally desperate of his heroines, with the homicidal tendencies of an Italian Lady Macbeth (of American affiliation), but she also anticipates the less melodramatic women of later films. She has the pathos of involuntary deceit; like Clara and Rosetta, as well as Claudia, she is swept up in passions she cannot control. But like a Hawks heroine, she is then tough with it. Her plan to despatch Fontana anticipates the more genteel rejection of Aldo by Irma in 'Il Grido', and it is in this connection that Paola is patently the first of Antonioni's studies of the sex he finds 'more instinctive, more sincere'. She contemplates murder not so much for money as for love, in the Clytemnes-

confusion had more in it to live for — Lucia Bosè contemplates her desert of a future in the last sequence of 'Signora senza Camelie'.

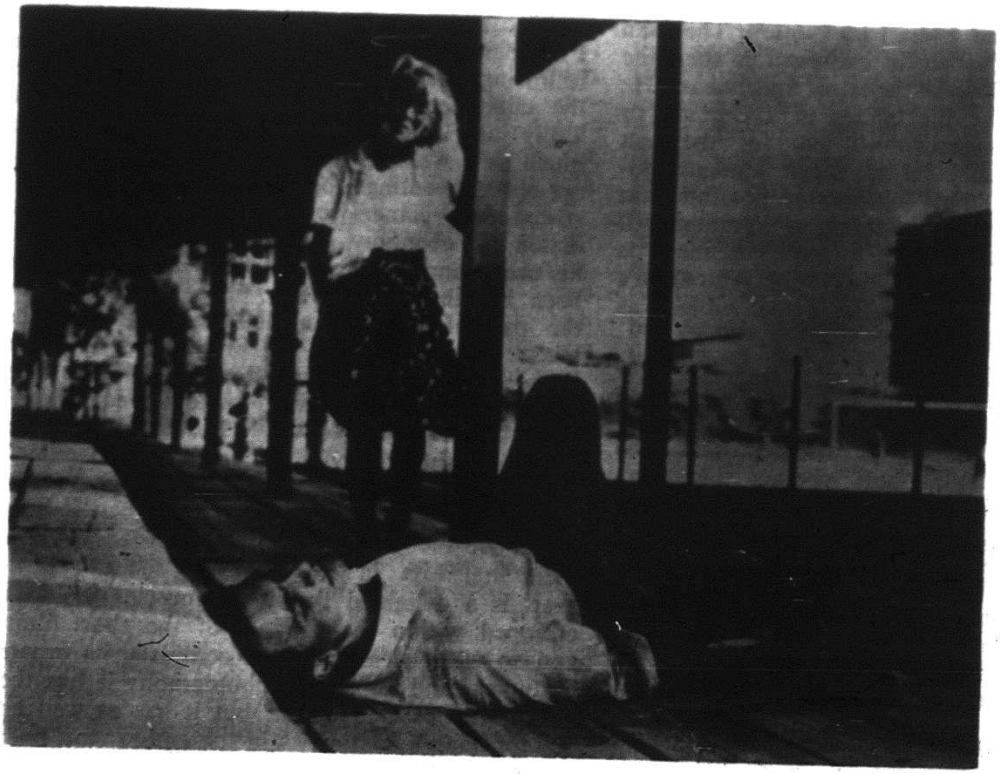
tra tradition, it is not an easy decision — she suffers most elegantly — but with Irma, Paola could say: 'What else can I do?' Choked with wealth, immersed, as if drowning, in her voluminous dresses, she has just enough of the self-centredness of a Momina ('Le Amiche') to proceed further in infidelity than do Patrizia ('L'Avventura') and Lidia ('La Notte'). The man she picks for a partner in escapism is then the first of a long line of inferior specimens. He does not even have the talents of a Lorenzo or a Sandro to commend him; but for the fact of Guido and Paola having been students together one would not conceive it possible that they could have a single thing in common. All that does seem to appeal to both of them is physical contact, and in this way Antonioni's first feature film handles the same subject as his latest.

Influences apart, 'Cronaca di un Amore' has another of the qualities today specifically associated with Antonioni, in that it leaves unresolved such practical matters as whether or not the deaths were accidental, and whether the detective's probings got anywhere. Instead, it concerns itself simply with the relationship between Paola and Guido, almost as if they grappled in a vacuum with difficulties of their own invention. The sequences in which they are together are designed with meticulous detail to support their self-involvement. A scene in a planetarium is so angled that the lovers appear to float in space; when they walk in the rain, reflected narcissistically in pools of water, the shine on the wet streets again seems to cut them off from the mainland of reality. It is not surprising that Antonioni developed a camera technique appropriate to this oneiric mood; like Renoir, he felt the need to be constantly mobile. 'My custom of filming in long takes was born spontaneously on the first day of shooting for 'Cronaca'. The fixed camera caused me immediate uneasiness. I felt paralysed, as if I was being prevented from following the only thing which interested me, the characters. The next day I got hold of a 'dolly' and I followed my characters around as much as I wanted. It was for me the best manner of presenting the truth.' Since 'Cronaca', Antonioni's camerawork has calmed down to match his economy in dialogue and expression; he uses panning very frequently, but there has been nothing in his other films quite to match the pan of more than 360 degrees while the lovers discuss plans on the bridge. Nor is he as prone to takes lasting sometimes as long as four minutes, preferring now to build up each scene from a mosaic of details. Movement of the camera in the trilogy is not for gratuitous effect, but first for convenience and second for suggestion, nearly always of tension (as when it hovers above the couple crossing the road towards their first kiss in 'L'Eclisse'). 'Cronaca', however, is a delighted flexing of muscles too long cramped within the confines of the short films, and so with its exaggerated contrasts, its ornate costumes, and its showy photography it has the exuberance of a first film; but it has as well an extraordinary maturity in attention to finer

points of symbolism and it expresses as subtle an understanding of mood as Antonioni has ever shown.

Having purged himself of American allegiances, Antonioni next set about some themes of social drama, perhaps convinced that these were matters of burning importance, perhaps consciously under the influence of mild neo-realism, perhaps simply wishing to prove that his capabilities were inexhaustible. He had little chance, as things turned out, of clarifying any of his motives within the film itself, but certainly 'I Vinti' does not give the impression of a director perfectly in harmony with his material. It is composed of three episodes dealing with teenage delinquency in Italy, France, and Britain, intended to show similarities of desperate aimlessness and defeatism between the post-war youth of the three countries. Episode films never seem to justify on the screen their evident attractiveness on paper; Antonioni at least did not have to battle for space with other directors in the sort of struggle that lost a quarter of 'Boccaccio 70' for the world in general, but he inevitably found himself limited in the amount of time possible for each section. Another constriction was the problem of censorship. Antonioni's first story for the Italian episode, in which a young neo-fascist endeavours without success to attract attention to what he considers the faults of the new republic (the full text can be found in Leprohon's book), was ruled inadmissible by the censor on the grounds that it showed political unrest in Italy. An alternative story was hastily put together, in which a well-to-do youth takes to cigarette smuggling for the hell of it, is pursued by the police, assisted by his devoted girl-friend, and at length killed in unlikely circumstances. The bite is gone, the plot is creaking sub-gangsterism, and the episode is only notable for the surprising beauty of its dockyard scenes, photographed with an almost expressionist sense of nightmare.

For the French episode, Antonioni went to Paris; he considered using either Jeanne Moreau or Brigitte Bardot, two starlets angling for a debut, but his final choice for the film was Etchika Choureau (recently shown to London in 'The White Slavers'), whom he teamed with another newcomer, Jean-Pierre Mocky. His assistant was Alain Cuny, a friend from the days of 'Les Visiteurs du Soir', and they did their filming, with a cavalier boldness for pre-nouvelle-vague days, in the streets of Paris itself, the Metro, and the Porte de Vincennes. The subject was the Guyader affair, a notorious murder case of a year or so before; some young men had killed one of their number for his money, a crime doubly senseless in that they were rich to start with and in that their friend only had counterfeit money with which he wanted to impress them. Permission was at first granted to film on condition that Antonioni was discreet in his references to the 'J3' criminals, but when the

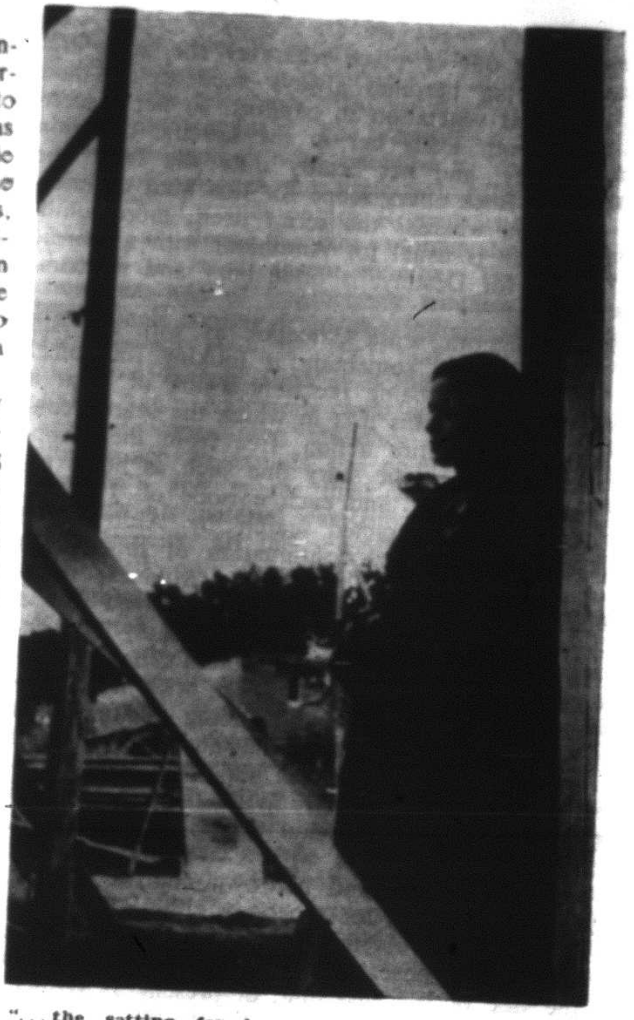


"...a well-to-do youth takes to cigarette smuggling for the hell of it..." — from the Italian episode of 'I Vinti'.

story got into the papers that an Italian was interpreting a French social disorder the authorities changed their minds; Antonioni managed to get his stock back to Italy, but the film has been banned in France ever since. The episode was Antonioni's favourite, made with extreme care and with admirable results; its key scenes, as with the other episodes, take place in countryside which manages to look Antonionian whatever the nationality (and contributes to give 'I Vinti' a general coherance), but it has also captured a Gallic flavour that is rather like a mixture of Cayatte and Franju.

The British episode, obviously influenced by the blacker Ealing comedies but made with incongruously serious intent, tells how a young Peter Reynolds tries to attract recognition by performing the perfect murder and then writing about it. His boredom with the Welfare State strikes so unlikely that his neuroticism takes on an allegorical air, as if his bid for the limelight summarised the inner frustrations of every European youngster, a generalisation amplified by the anonymous setting of the Surrey Downs on which the murder is performed. Despite conscientious establishing shots, which Antonioni filmed in Piccadilly Circus, and a bluff performance from Patrick Barr as a very British (but not particularly real) reporter, the episode rings more true abroad than it does in this country where its variable authenticity doesn't quite match its aesthetic qualities. It also leaves one free to ponder the justification for Antonioni's argument in 'I Vinti' as a whole, which is both Socialist and nihilist in its apparent implication that capitalism is self-destroying — a political axe sharpened by having international backgrounds to its grinding. But this, like the film, doesn't do Antonioni full justice. 'I Vinti' is basically an experiment in style, in which he investigated the possibility of saying the same thing in the same way in three separate national climates — a test, as it were, of the universal relevance of his methods of directing. In that the film does have some unity beneath its superficial changes of atmosphere, his experiment was not unsuccessful, but neither he nor anybody else seems ever to have derived much satisfaction from it.

With his next film, 'Signora sensa Camelie' 1952-53), Antonioni shifted back to safer ground — to the romanesque style of 'Cronaca', to his favourite subject (woman), to his dislike of 'pop' cinema (as partly expressed earlier in L'Amorosa Menzogna'), and to his conviction that class divisions are ineradicable. He also tried his hand, encouraged by Suso Cecchi D'Amico (who had earlier teamed with Visconti to write 'Bellissima', a film of very similar stock), at a heavy form of satire. The story of Clara,



"... the setting for her more dismal moments ..." — Clara in Signora sensa Camelie'

however, turned out to be a rather unfunny combination of Pirandello and 'Shooting Stars'. I cannot remember having shared, when I saw 'Signora' a couple of years ago, the widely-voiced opinion that Lucia Bosè was not up to her part — rather the reverse. It seemed more as if Antonioni had wanted Gina Lollobrigida or Sophia Loren, his unobtainable first choices, because by very nature they would have put vitality into an otherwise anaemic and novelettish creation. Lucia Bosè gave the part a different dimension; she has the docility of a Chekhov heroine ('Lady with the Little Dog' is an obvious example, but I was thinking particularly of the soulfully dispirited trio in 'Three Sisters'), and there is a similar dignity about her manner of introspection. The passivity which this gives to the character of Clara is perhaps inconsistent with her venture into the film industry in the first place but it certainly accounts for her lack of success when she gets there. As a strikingly regal member of the working classes she gives the impression, very appropriately,

of being out of place wherever she goes. But Chekhovian heroines always need to do their anguished vegetation in comfort, so her disconsolate path leads her in the specific direction of money, and her beauty does the rest. The face of Bosè offers scope for this kind of interpretation, whereas the script itself, more lumbered than is usual for Antonioni with a Nordic respect for Destiny, is often hazy and noncommittal.

In 'Signora senza Camelie', as with all Antonioni's films, somebody is looking for something without being precisely aware of what it is. The film is his first in which the search constitutes the entire action, free from the trappings of a dramatic story line such as holds together 'Cronaca' and each episode of 'I Vinti' (The more protracted search by Aldo in 'Il Grido' is a logical continuation of this form.) Clara Manni (Lucia Bosè) is a Milanese shopgirl whose exceptional looks have won her a screen test as first prize in a beauty contest. In the opening scene of 'Signora' she contemplates the result, her first film, with a detachment emphasised by her standing position in a crowded cinema. When the audience emerges into the street, she hears her producers planning her future for her. With these few shots Antonioni makes it plain that Clara the person has few connections with Clara the film-star; her career is beyond her own control, as if it is all happening to somebody else. Rather, she has another problem — that of her real identity, the real purpose of her existence. She is, like the title of her next film, at present a 'Woman without a Destiny'; it is the result of having been ejected from one class into another — as she says: 'All I know how to do is buy cloth, and that's because I used to sell it'. But having made a name for herself as an actress she is cut off from her past, just as she is emotionally detached from her present.

One way out of the predicament seems to offer itself when her self-appointed agent and producer, Gianni Franchi (Andrea Cecchi, stalwart of the Italian cinema, is more in control here than during his recent vampiric perambulations in 'Black Sunday'), decides to marry her. It is a decision she is cautious about, but her parents are delighted at the idea and she finds herself honeymooning in no time. Gianni takes over her career completely, and instead of allowing her acting to mature, he rushes her into a new 'Joan of Arc', which he considers to be the right sort of vehicle for her talents. In a painful scene at the Venice Festival we see some shots from the film; it looks a pretty hamstrung charade, and the audience doesn't take to it at all. Somebody behind Clara, sitting miserably conscious of her failure, murmurs: 'Such presumption, after Falconetti and Bergman!' Dreyer's film hangs symbolically over Clara just as it does for Nana in 'Vivre sa vie'; the two of them, like the Lark herself, are martyrs betrayed by men they trusted after having been betrayed, more fundamentally, by themselves.

Clara cannot bear to sit out the film and she leaves in tears. She is followed by Nardo (Ivan Desny), an oily young diplomat looking for diversion, and although she foils his persistence for some days, she finally gives in to him. This is because Gianni, in serious financial difficulties after the flop of 'Joan of Arc', has given her very little sympathy or attention; she is frustrated in her career and in her marriage. Conscious of her duty to her husband, she does not abandon him to his suicidal poverty, instead she finishes the interrupted 'Woman without a Destiny', which is a commercial success, and uses her earnings to set Gianni on his feet again. Only then does she apply for a separation. In this way she is a link between the guilty couple in 'Cronaca' and the troubled conscience of Claudia (as well as, to a lesser extent, those of Rosetta, Irma, and Lidia). Indeed, she is the most practical, in her consideration towards others, of all Antonioni's women. When Nardo turns out a dud and wants to get rid of her she doesn't make threats or appeals, she doesn't pester him or curse him. She just says goodbye.

Alone, Clara seeks the advice of her co-star Lodi (Alain Cuny, giving his Steiner performance), and her director, Ercole (Gino Cervi), with whom she had worked on her big success. They advise her to go and see Gianni who is setting up a new film, and to ask him for the leading role. Clara goes back to the Cinecittà studios, which throughout the film have been the setting for her more dismal moments, and finds that Gianni has no intention of paying his debt to her. He wants, he says, somebody famous — an ironic statement, in that he has himself caused both her fame and her downfall. The only part Clara can get is in one of the sub-pornographic films her husband once objected to; convinced that she will never be an actress, an opinion confirmed when she hears from outside one of the studios a grandiose speech being delivered by an important star, she accepts the ruin of her hopes and her future. She will become little better than a 'fumetti' model, starring in such tinsel rubbish as the film which awaits her — 'Slave of the Sphinx' (another meaningful title). In melancholy recognition of her spiritual suicide which, as with Aldo in 'Il Grido', is the result of circumstances beyond her control, Clara telephones Nardo in capitulation. Everything will

be as empty, as brittle, as sordid as he wants it. Then she turns to the publicity photographers for her 'new' picture, and from somewhere she manages to produce for them the shadow of a smile.

A recurring word in 'Signora', as Richard Roud mentioned in an NFT programme note, is 'sbagliare' — to make a mistake. Clara's biggest mistake was made before the film started, when she allowed herself to be bundled into the film industry. Yet the point of her story is not that she goes on making one mistake after another, which would suggest that she has only herself to blame for her position, but that the mistakes are all made for her. She is fated to be booted around like a football, because, in fact, she doesn't know the game. But Antonioni does not view her inertia as he later views that of Aldo, sentimentally. Clara is not dying for love; on the contrary, she learns (or rather, she is driven) to exist with her affection for the weak and repulsive Nardo much as Nene will later put up with Lorenzo. She is dying intellectually and morally because she does not know how she should live. She did know once, and perhaps the weakness of 'Signora' is that it never shows us what possessed her to abandon that knowledge — only Lucia Bosè, as I have said, implies by her expression the wistful longing to be more than just a shop-girl. Antonioni, however, is using the film to get some ideas straight about the destructive effect of one class upon another, and at the same time to voice his contempt as an artist of the attitude that a film (like the actors and actresses in it) is only a commodity to be bought and sold like a can of beans. 'Signora' has, as a result, an indecisive air; it plays for sympathy, but finally one tends to wonder, as at the end of 'Il Grido', what one is supposed to feel sorry for. The characters are themselves rather like something out of a 'pop' Italian weepie; they are moved around the screen with fine technical skill and certainty, they are posed against ideally suitable surroundings, and photographed with mathematically calculated beauty, but they never quite step out from all that skill and all that calculation and contrive to move around the heart.

Antonioni's next film, 'Tentato Suicidio', the second episode in 'Amore in Città', has often been seized upon as of tremendous significance because of its subject, suicide. The significance, I think, lies not in that he made a film on this subject, but in what he gained from the making of it. Contrary to popular supposition Antonioni did not pick the theme himself. 'That episode in "Amore in Città" has quite a story I did it for friendship. It was asked of me by someone to whom I was indebted, so I accepted in order to return a kindness. And then I didn't even have a subject — it was given me on the telephone. "Do suicides" they said. So I did suicides.' The survey as a whole, Zavattini-inspired, was intended to show by a series of episodes the various hurdles littering the path of contemporary Roman true love — rather as does the not uninteresting 'Latin Lovers' of more recent months. The flavour, however, was of fragmentary triteness, without the punch coming from one individual outlook (a personal view is what makes Gregoretti's 'I Nuovi Angeli' succeed despite its nine sections). Again Antonioni came up against limited space (a restraining influence which probably does much to explain the compactness of 'Le Amiche'), and in the final version of 'Amore in Città' his material was trimmed with Procrustean ferocity. Of the several cases he had investigated, only three were left.

'Tentato Suicidio' deals with people who have attempted to commit suicide and are prepared to say why they did so. The episode begins with a small herd of them trooping into a studio and standing forlornly before a vast cyclorama; a commentary, dubbed into American for the export trade, burbles some ill-chosen words about how city life breaks the ties with one's family, and then there is a very Antonionian pan across a park with buildings beside it to where a woman sits on a bench. We are told she has broken with her fiancé. She ambles across one road, then steps in front of a car on another. Having thus reconstructed her suicide attempt, she is presented to us in the studio and is asked some not very searching questions. The interviewer contrives to be optimistic about her and goes quickly on to subject the second. This one moves down a flight of steps to the edge of a river and tells us how she tried to drown herself; her description continues while the camera 'floats' slowly into mid-current and drifts under a bridge. Back in the studio, a man loitering behind her, she says: 'Life was ugly, without purpose.' 'But it has a purpose now?', the commentary observes. The happy couple smiles sheepishly.

Subject the third is said to suffer from 'Existentialist and subjective feelings'. We encounter her dancing in a cafe to a little number ghoulishly entitled 'I love you so much I could die'. We are told she has no money but the next shot shows her buying petrol for her scooter so we are in some confusion about the next assertion, that 'she drifted into accepting the attentions of an older man; her fiancé consequently left her.' At her dingy room, the girl casually lies on the bed and in close-up she brings a razor blade to her wrist, which turns to reveal — it is a disturbing moment — a long

scar. She describes her feelings as she waited to die. Back in the studio, isolated as were the others against the cyclorama background (a clinical effect?), she says: 'I don't care for life.' The commentary is scornful: 'Do you think you are too old at your age? Aren't you going a bit far? Think about it a little.' The episode concludes with the same group of people leaving the studio; most of them we don't recognise because they were cut out. We are told that thanks to having discussed their problems they are leaving with 'a new outlook on life and the meaning of love.' They don't seem convinced any more than we are.

'The whole world is in agreement that my episode came last in the film in order of merit. Perhaps they are right, it's not for me to judge. However, working on this picture has been unnerving. I've worked as a newspaper man, a police reporter, and I am used to interviewing the people who make up the tragic side of the day's news. My documentary experience was also very close to life. But in 'Amore in Città' my work was as close to reality as an observer can get. The job of getting people to tell their stories was not too difficult — we've known for many years that there is something theatrical in the make-up of people who try to kill themselves. In a way, it is an effort to make oneself the centre of a drama. What was nerve-racking was photographing these people on the actual location where they had attempted suicide. One girl, the one who jumped into the Tiber, fainted during the re-enactment. The boy friend of another, the same one who had driven her to attempt suicide, arrived on the scene as we were shooting, and threatened to break up the work. The girl finally convinced him that the money she was earning would be a nice dowry.

'Most of these people were happy that they had tried to kill themselves, and that they were now there talking about it in front of a camera; they were content to be making such easy money. They flirted with each other. They tried to make me believe they had wanted to die, that they had repeated their attempts several times, that all things considered they were unlucky not to have succeeded. Moreover, they were prepared to try again tomorrow if they found themselves in the same situation.

'I am sure this isn't true. I am sure they didn't speak the truth, that they exaggerated from I don't know what form of vanity and masochism. From something not moral but psychological . . . Suicide is so enigmatic a gesture, it can be examined from multiple points of view — anatomical and physio-pathological, statistically, sociologically, and psychologically. It was not such a simple theme; one only has to scratch the surface and all sorts of difficulties come to light. Within the very constricted limits allowed me what could I do? I sought to arouse in the public an aversion to suicide by showing the spiritual desolation of these people. I aimed directly at the basic theme.'

'Tentato Suicidio' has a feeling of Rogosin or Rouch about its method of getting people to describe and re-enact their own problems. It also has a kind of television interview neo-realism which is flatly unpleasant, superficially voyeurist, and no more revealing than a newpaper paragraph. But I think it is important because it brought Antonioni closely into contact with the attitude of mind his films had previously presented with a different emphasis. He met in real life the 'spiritual desolation' of which Clara and the suicidal heroes of 'I Vinti' (and, more remotely, the two victims in 'Cronaca') had been the rather idealistic embodiment. His next story

"...driving by his usual route home..." Fontana's car in 'Cronaca di un Amore'.

was to be 'Il Grido', and the change is considerable; Aldo's concern is not with identity or recognition — it is wth love. This next film was to be 'Le Amche', and here Rosetta, like the three sad-eyed women of 'Tentato', kills herself because love has gone sour. Before 'Amore in Città' the Antonioni death-roll is (1) 'Cronaca' — two unspecific suicides, possibly for love, (2) 'I Vinti' — one political suicide, one murder-suicide for recognition, one judicial suicide for recognition, and (3) 'Signora' — one attempted suicide for financial reasons, one spiritual suicide for lack of integration. Afterwards we have (1) 'Le Amiche' — one attempted, later successful suicide, for love, (2) 'Il Grido' — one spiritual, later physical suicide, for love, and (3) 'L'Avventura' — one disappearance, possibly suicide, for love. (As an interesting corollary, the death of Tommaso in 'La Notte' and of the drunk in 'L'Eclisse' are implicitly the result of civilisation disease — Antonioni's ultra neo-realist consciousness is beginning a new cycle.) 'Tentato Suicidio' thus punctuates Antonioni's career rather noticeably; one may reasonably infer that it was the catalyst between eclecticism and humanism. It was yet another step towards the perfected formula.

The year is 1953. The work of Michelangelo Antonioni in the cinema to this point has been a haphazard series of casts, like those of an angler feeling the current. But these necessary and by no means undistinguished preliminaries to his major films are interlocked by a profounder quality than resemblances of theme and implication. They conform in essence to one of Carl Sternheim's stipulations in 1918: 'To preserve his strength, man must listen not to outdated clichés but to his own fresh, individual voice. And if this voice at times has brutal things to say or to imply he must not trouble himself about the public response.' The individual voice of Antonioni had found its tongue; with 'Il Grido' and 'Le Amiche' it set about making itself heard.

IL GRIDO: the depths

ALTHOUGH the idea for 'Il Grido' first came to Antonioni shortly after making his documentary 'Gente del Pô', and while he was working with De Santis in Tuscany on 'Caccia Tragica', he did not put the project fully into shape until after 'Tentato Suicidio'. He offered it to several producers without success, and as a result it was set on one side while he made 'Le Amiche'. Nearly two years later in the spring of 1956, the producer Franco Cancellieri remembered the story and offered Antonioni the chance to make it. Filming began in the autumn of that year, after the summer had been spent in refurbishing the script and choosing locations.

'Il Grido' is consequently a film which has got out of line. In content it has more in common with Antonioni's early films than with the trilogy. It is a logical extension of ideas set in motion by the research for 'Tentato Suicidio'. It is set in an area long familiar to Antonioni; he wrote stories and articles about the Pô valley before 1947 as a journalist, and his first documentary film explored the same territory. It has a veneer of neo-realism that is in the tradition of 'I Vinti' and of 'Tentato Suicidio'. It has a mood of despair strongly linked with that of 'Signora senza Camelie'.

On the other hand, the lessons learned during the making of 'Le Amiche' contributed to turn 'Il Grido' into an almost aggressively self-assertive film, with the unhurried, deliberate, and introvert style of the trilogy to follow. If 'Le Amiche', with its close-knit construction, was to date Antonioni's technically most confident film, 'Il Grido' saw that confidence burgeon into the magnificent independence of another Orson Welles. Antonioni left for good the well-tilled ground of conventional tragedy and orthodox studio work, and set out purposefully on his own path with his own methods. He had reached the point in competence where aesthetic considerations could dominate all else; now, as he later said, 'I can actually permit myself to make some minor technical errors; and I do make them, sometimes even on purpose, in order to obtain a greater degree of effectiveness.'

'Il Grido' was not the ideal choice for a new aestheticism. Had Antonioni been able to film the story of Aldo when he was keyed up to it after 'Tentato Suicidio' he would, interesting to note, have made it with the formal precision which instead was devoted to 'Le Amiche'. As a result, one may conjecture, 'Le Amiche' would then have anticipated even more in its style the films it so definitely heralds in content, whereas 'Il Grido', seen in its appropriate context beside De Sica's 'Il Tetto' and Fellini's 'Il Bidone', could have been a far greater commercial success. As it is, the rigid economy of 'Le Amiche' works so superbly that one would not wish it the greater length its several subjects deserve, but 'Il Grido' (in fact only ten minutes longer) appears so leisured in its richness of mood, so self-indulgent in its pessimism, that one feels restless in the face of its apparent overstatement.

I say 'apparent' because 'Il Grido' no more repeats itself than does any other of Antonioni's films. In dissecting a body one cannot remove the skin twice, the dissection of Aldo's state of mind follows a definite progression. The women he encounters all have in common an inability to replace the woman he has lost, but Aldo has to make this discovery anew in each individual case, until, convinced of its application in totality, he wanders back to his starting point. The impression at first sight that there is not enough development in the action of the film is the result, to my mind, of two very constant factors. The first is Steve Cochran's expression, which is constantly one of deep gloom, his stance is so unvaryingly hunched beneath the dead weight of his life, that sympathy for him becomes forfeit to impatience. Surprisingly, not even his clothes imply a downward path, their condition is too erratic for the audience confidently to look to them as an indication of Aldo's fortunes, and at the end — when by rights no woman could have done his laundry for him for some time — his jacket, shirt, and tie are in a remarkable state of cleanliness. Presumably this could be interpreted as a contrast with his crumpled frame of mind, or again that he is wearing his best clothes for his own funeral, but it strikes more of Robbe-Grillet than of neo-realism.

My other explanation for the feeling of tedium which sets in if one is not readily moved by the despondency of 'Il Grido' is that the Pô valley in late autumn is far from a riot of colour. Once Aldo has left the village of Goriano and become by implication a social as well as an emotional outcast the flat grey wastes which repeatedly and deliberately accentuate the bleakness of his position seem continuous and unalterable. This is exactly the effect Antonioni wanted, and he could hardly have picked a better place for it, but the result is so extreme that one's initial admiration is quickly dissipated by the monotony. There are few critics who have failed to remark on the setting of 'Il Grido', but even fewer have then gone on to praise the film whole-heartedly.

'Il Grido' is not an easy film to like; certainly it does not invite enjoyment in its story, in its photography (no reflection on Gianni di Venanzo, who does his best with a minimum of photogenic material), or in its rather confused implications. What has won awards for it is the complete assurance with which Antonioni has put together scene after scene. His subtlety in matters of gesture, of relative position, and of statement, is ostensibly more naked because the general complexity of 'Le Amiche' and the visual ornateness of 'L'Avventura' are lacking, but it is no less masterful for the absence of surface gloss. Whether or not one chooses to believe in his characters (the cast evokes a mixed response), one cannot help but respect what he does with them. 'Il Grido' is valuable as a stylistic testing ground, a film in which one can see Antonioni sorting out his ideas, while at the same time laying the ghosts of his personal and cinematic past.

The film begins with shots, behind the credits, of Irma (Alida Valli) walking into Goriano. Although poorly dressed, she has the determined, near-arrogant, bearing of a woman who knows her own mind. It seems she has been summoned here to be given the information that her husband has died in Australia; Irma turns towards the camera looking not so much upset as plain worried. This preface over, we are introduced to Aldo (Steve Cochran), who is working on the tower of the local sugar refinery; a man calls up to him that Irma has come to see him and we look over Aldo's shoulder down to the ground as she says she has brought his lunch and hurries away. From this moment, although one does not fully realise it until the shot from nearly the same angle in the same place at the end of the film, Aldo is as good as dead. His confusion at the unexpected appearance and departure of Irma anticipates his enigmatic fall from the tower; it is as if all the events in between are an hallucination — an emotional death to match up with the reality of, perhaps, what could have been a stumble or an attack of dizziness.

But for the moment Aldo does not fall from the tower. Instead, in long-shot, we see him descending the stairs while in the foreground Irma passes his lunch to a workmate and quickly leaves. In his pursuit of her into the mists Aldo begins the search which is to occupy him for the rest of the film; his descent of the tower signifies his renunciation of success and prestige for the sake of an ideal which has failed him. It is suicide number one.

Aldo goes to a rather bare little building and lets himself in; there is no sign of Irma (whom we have seen going on a furtive visit), but as he finds himself a cigarette, a detail showing how familiar he is with the place, a little girl of about six comes in who turns out to be Rosina (Mirna Girardi), his and Irma's daughter. She tells him she got a 'D' at school, to which he abstractedly replies 'Fine'; the joke, if it is one, misfires because the audience is given no indication as to whether a 'D' is good or bad — another example of Antonioni's awkward handling of something which requires a sense of humour. Then Irma goes into the house. In tears she gives Aldo the news that her husband is dead and Aldo is delighted be-

"... her face is blank, without pleasure, without malice ..." — Dorian Gray and Steve Cochran in 'Il Grido'.

cause now at last he and Irma can get married; that this is not quite what Irma has on her mind is shown in the look of anguish she throws him over her shoulder, which he mistakes for concern at his lack of respect for the dead. Cut off from both of them by a symbolic pane of glass, Rosina is visible in the background; the scene fades on this pathetic trio.

The showdown comes next morning. On the river bank Irma tells Aldo: 'We're not close any more. I've changed — I must be sincere — I want to go away.' With the realisation that there is another man in her life, Aldo looks thickly incredulous and a piano motif plays softly on the soundtrack. 'Then all these seven years — none of it was true?' Her answer that it was true until four months ago doesn't get through to him. Just as an early gesture of striking her changes into a caress, all Aldo's actions from then on alternate between violence and a clumsy tenderness. In grabbing at her arm he upsets milk all over the floor (in 'The Manchurian Candidate' spilt milk has much the same inference); he goes back to work in an effort to restore a surface normality, but intolerable suspicions that Irma's lover is among his fellow workmen drives him to try and pick a fight; in a scene reminiscent of the paint-shop discussion in 'L'Avventura' he tries to win Irma back by buying her a belt (another constriction symbol), but she says 'Why waste good money for nothing?' and the gambit falls through even further when he grabs her and kisses her — she hangs unresponsive in his arms like a rag doll. He visits his mother for advice, but her lack of sympathy irritates him and he smashes a bottle on the floor as he leaves.

With Aldo's natural but undiscerning violence Irma's decision strengthens. In a scene with her sister she reveals how little she wants to break up Aldo's life, but that she cannot help herself: 'We can't go on, it's humiliating for both of us. I'm desperate but what can I do? This is too strong for me.' Their final encounter is particularly impressive. A pan with Aldo searching for Irma through the village moves round at least 240 degrees, at the end of which the two come abruptly face to face. Still in long-shot he slaps her and tells her to come home. The camera moves in closer as, thus disgraced among an onlooking crowd of villagers she says furiously: 'Now it's really finished', and departs in battered dignity. Aldo leaves in the opposite direction, the villagers making way for him. By this outbreak he is no longer acceptable either to them or to her. He is an exile; he has no legal claim to Irma (strange that Catholics should have tried to ban the film — it shows

plainly how an adulterer gets his deserts); he cannot stay on at the village, without a home and without the respect of the villagers; he cannot continue at the sugar-refinery, where he might find himself side by side with Irma's new husband (a man we are, like Aldo, never to see). So Aldo takes his daughter and hitches a lift on a small cart, and is carried morosely away into the dusk, as behind him, as if in celebration, a row of street lights comes on; the driver of the cart, looking back, says, with considerable overstatement 'Beautiful place, Goriano; gives the impression people are happy there . . . . .'

The three women who punctuate Aldo's pilgrimage into solitude each represent a facet of Irma's character in their attitude towards him, and the feelinga of being haunted by Irma (who thus becomes the personification of all women) is important to the feeling of 'Il Grido' itself. Aldo's condition becomes the more hopeless with each encounter until he realises, as has the audience, that no woman can give him what he is obscurely searching for. Since he hasn't the will or the sense to compromise, since he hasn't the strength or the money to break away completely and use his talents as an engineer to get him abroad, since (Antonioni implies) he is crippled by a set of values that are completely unrealistic, he is fated inevitably to batter at love like a bird at a lighthouse until he falls exhausted.

With one of those typical Antonioni cuts to an apparently unconnected subject — in this case an erratic speed-boat being tested on the river — Aldo arrives (on the bank) at his first possible rehabilitation centre. It is the home of Elvira (Betsy Blair), a friend of his for some years, whose enthusiasm at seeing Aldo explains to a considerable extent why she is still unmarried. Betsy Blair, as in 'Senilità', speaks volumes with her eyes while making nervous and excited movements with her body; when Aldo offers to help repair the speed boat she gestures with her hands together like a prayer and bursts out in his support: 'He's the best mechanic in the world!' While watching the motor boat race which follows in the pouring rain; she tucks in close to him under the umbrella with such pleasure that her younger sister Edera (Gabriella Palloti), with whom she shares the house, makes a coy remark and Elvira, embarrassed transfers her attention to Rosina. Aldo agrees to take her to a local dance that evening if the motor boat he had a hand in repairing wins the race; it doesn't, but they will go anyway. The promise serves to emphasise the potentialities of their relationship; Antonioni then goes on to show why it isn't going to work. The scene is an awkward one, about as unconvincing a change of mood as the business in 'L'Avventura' when Claudia laughs at somebody else's conversation in the train; Elvira jokingly draws Aldo's attention to Edera having a mild row with her young man — but Aldo doesn't see the joke. Edera's overheard assertion 'I'll do what I please' reminds him of Irma and he wanders off without another word. Elvira sends Rosina after him but very wisely doesn't pursue him herself, a gesture of discretion establishing that her character is like that of Nene in 'Le Amiche'. Aldo moodily sits in a shed out of the rain and contemplates the spectre of Irma, of whom Rosina constitutes a further reminder.

Like a reincarnation, Irma herself is waiting outside Elvira's house with a suitcase full of Aldo's things which she has brought, she says, as he is likely to pass that way. She gets little thanks for her consideration; Elvira treats her coldly, blames the break-up entirely on her, and says: 'I am sure Aldo still loves you.' Unable to defend herself, Irma quickly leaves. Elvira is also very brusque with a suitor who then calls to see her; she lets him in, but doesn't even look at him, and soon he, too, departs. From these two scenes we realise Elvira's pertubation; Aldo would be a far better catch for her than the usual run of mud-faced peasants who pester her, but she has too much of a conscience to accept him when, for one thing, Rosina is Irma's daughter. (The fact that Rosina is between them has been delicately suggested at the first meeting, when the little girl is visible through the window behind Elvira). Her rudeness to Irma is thus a natural mixture of jealousy and distress.

She comes out with her feelings in the middle of the evening. The dance is one of those sad, sombre functions which to judge from the Italian cinema contribute immeasurably to the oppression of the Italian male (see, among countless examples, 'I Nuovi Angeli', 'Accattone', 'La Notte Brava' and 'La Commare Secca'). It is enlivened by a contest intended to reveal 'Miss Popularity', who will apparently be the girl on whom admirers have showered the most ribbons by the end of the dance. Edera, whose manner of dancing at close quarters suggests on what her popularity is being based, seems to be well in the running, so Aldo and Elvira significantly (neither of them is the sociable sort) pass all their ribbons over to her when Elvira says she wants to go outside and talk. It is the moment when Aldo could be consolidating his position, but instead he can find no answer to her accusation: 'You wouldn't have come to me if Irma hadn't deserted you.' Elvira has her pride as well as her loneliness. She tells him Irma has sent his things (although

she doesn't mention that Irma brought them herself), and she tells him to 'say what you want, and then go away'. Aldo wants Irma, but cannot say so. After having looked everywhere but at each other during the course of the scene they meander off into the night, and like everybody else who walks alongside Aldo in the course of 'Il Grido' Elvira is only a couple of feet away from him physically but the true distance between them is many, many miles.

Elvira is the second woman to reject Aldo, but this rejection is not because he has used force or because she doesn't love him any more (although it has only been implied by Betsy Blair's acting that she does love him) — it is because conversely he has not been assertive enough. When he should have been saying all the things Elvira wants to hear he has been silent; the thought of Irma muffles him. With his monumental lack of tact he can handle Elvira no less awkwardly than he handled Irma, and, worse, he hasn't got his heart in it this time. He can't even take advantage of Edera, when, literally drunk with having won the title of 'Miss Popularity', she topples invitingly into his arms that night. After one kiss, he packs her off to her bed and falls face down on his own, repeating Irma's name into the pillow while Edera laughs at him from the stairs. And so for Aldo there is no salvation in old friends (Elvira) or in promiscuity (Edera). Next morning he and Rosina have gone.

What is Rosina's response to the life she is now leading? Antonioni proceeds to give some indication. The little girl has hardly said a word so far, although her presence is constantly apparent. Now, as we see her looking wistfully at children playing in a school beside the road, we realise that she too feels an outcast and that the bars which separate her from them, keep them in a cage of security which she longs to share. As if in confirmation of the hostile environment she is being forced to endure (and she has not complained — she is the most passive of Aldo's women), she is nearly run over by a car when she chases a ball that has been kicked out of the playground. And then her father slaps her for being careless, while the schoolchildren watch silently behind their bars. Rosina runs off along the road to escape the horror of the moment, only to encounter something worse. She goes straight into the thick of a group of mental defectives, who stand in a variety of poses, each looking in a different direction — like a caricature of the Antonioni image of society. When one of them turns delightedly to Rosina and moves to caress her, she bursts into tears that are not so much of fright as of sympathy; it is as of she recognises the link between their empty existence and hers. Aldo is soon around to soothe her but there is no concealing what she really needs; she points to the buildings visible a long way off and asks if they are going there. She is tired of the bleak countryside and the life it means. Then Aldo gets her interested in the state of her dress; in the keenest moment of pathos of the film she says: 'Mamma will make me one when she comes.' Aldo straightens slowly, and the two move off down the road in the wake of the madmen.

The next woman in Aldo's life is Virginia (Dorian Gray), who runs a roadside petrol station. Aldo has hitched a lift on a petrol lorry which stops there and can take him temporarily no further because of a police patrol. Virginia's father, a farmer who has grown almost too ancient to work is a recalcitrant old soak who keeps running back to his farm (which Virginia has sold) to yell insults at its new owners. He and Rosina get on very well; after a long time without an audience they each have someone to listen to them at last. Virginia, a young widow, exudes an animal magnetism which to Aldo, in his hyper-frustration, is irresistible. He finds himself running the place next day while she is pursuing a customer who has tried to swindle her (an episode which shows that Virginia is another determined woman), and she takes this as an excuse to hire him. In the kitchen that evening, in a scene tense with physical awareness, they circle round each other like a couple of gladiators lining up the first blow, and it is with no surprise that we see Aldo on her bed the next morning. Virginia discovers that her father and Rosina have vanished but she tells Aldo they are still in bed, in order to keep him to herself a little longer. In fact, Rosina is watching the old man throw stones at the team of labourers pulling down a tree on his farm. When Virginia is summoned to come and collect them, Aldo is annoyed at her deception. The constant problem of Rosina's welfare is thus counterbalanced by Virginia's trouble with her father, two factors which disturb what could otherwise be a fruitful relationship. Antonioni now goes on to show how these factors are removed and how the removal of them is no solution.

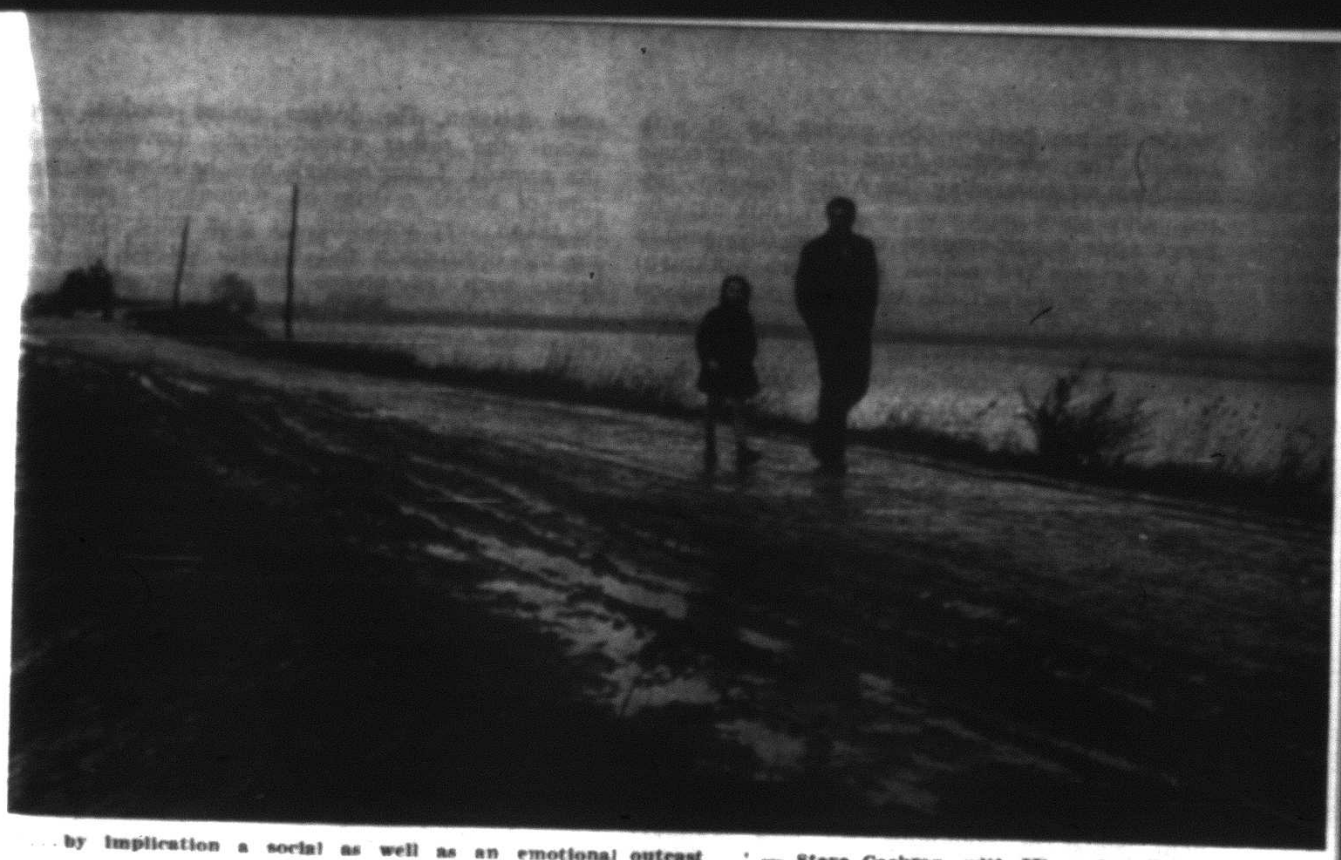
In a brief, complex, but visually clumsy scene, in which Virginia buys a holy picture from a cyclist with a basketful (a touch which is (1) an indication of her devout simplicity and deplorable taste, (2) a nice backhand swipe at the distribution of sanctity like an article of grocery, and (3) a sign of her unconscious wish to atone for her adultery, and to bring down blessings upon Aldo and herself), and the couple sit together beside the petrol pumps in a

snatched moment of domestic peace, the old man has an accident off-screen. Again their harmony is interrupted; Aldo makes a very awkward move into the road to see what has happened, and in the next shot the doctor has come, and Aldo registers irritability by kicking tins around in the back garden while Virginia looks on briefly from the kitchen. She has decided father will have to go: 'Today it's his leg, tomorrow, who knows?' There is a fade to a gloomy vaulted hall like a crypt, lined with old men. Somewhere in its depths they have left Virginia's father, and when Rosina passes through the rows of living dead the same point is being made as in her encounter with the mental defectives. Yet at the same time she is linked with Aldo and Virginia to show that she, too, is to get in their way. Aldo has a scuffle in the street outside, when a group of men annoy Virginia, and the exercise of strength makes him feel pleased with himself, while the woman he has fought for is in return just that bit more amorous and admiring. Free from the old man, Rosina forgotten, they settle down logically to love-making in the not altogether incongruous setting of large abandoned cable reels on a sandy wasteland. Antonioni switches to the little girl, amusing herself by collecting stones, she wanders among the wooden reels, coming gradually into close-up until she stops abruptly, facing the camera. Her face is blank, but as she turns and runs away she scatters heedlessly her collection of stones. The game is over. Interrupted yet again, Aldo and Virginia (back to back) indulge in mutial recriminations; for Aldo, the betrayal of his daughter (who is thereby added to the women who have rejected him) reminds him that he is also betraying his love for Irma; to Virginia, on the other hand, the upset confirms that Rosina must be disposed of if she is to enjoy Aldo without distraction.

So Aldo is persuaded to send his daughter back to her mother. In the coldest scene of the film, with a thin layer of snow mottling the fields beside the road, Aldo comes to collect Rosina who is snowballing with some other children. When she sees him she comes without a word and they walk silently together (if the term is not misleadingly intimate) to put her on the bus home. As he says goodbye to her through the window of the bus, Aldo finds his tongue: 'I'll think of you always. Papa can't explain why he doesn't want to work any more, but he'll change.' It is a confused attempt at an apology, but it reveals partly the excuse Aldo has made to the little girl for sending her home, partly an admission of his psychological inability to support her properly, and partly a flicker still of the unfounded conviction that everything will come right again. Then Rosina is carried away; like Irma, she is lost to him. Aldo goes to find Virginia who is waiting for him in a cafe, but as he sees her through the door he hesitates. There is nothing physically to keep them apart, but there is nothing emotionally to keep them together. Virginia has organised him, as effectively as did Irma, into a life without Irma; and the lack of scruple with which she has betrayed her family and his is reminiscent of Irma's deceits, first of her husband, then of Aldo. But she cannot deceive him into loving her, for Aldo has only one love and this he cannot lose. And so for Aldo there is no salvation in security. Unnoticed, he leaves Virginia sitting in the cafe, he rejects the house, the job, the love which awaits him. Driven on by the memory of seven years he takes to the road again.

Andreina (Lyn Shaw), whom Aldo meets while sharing a hedgehog (times are hard) with a dredging crew with whom he is briefly employed, has something to offer which Aldo hasn't encountered before. She is penniless, and she is blissfully high-spirited. Afflicted by jaundice, she forgets to be ill when Aldo turns up in response to her distress signals, and she bounces all over the bed with delight at his presence. Antonioni cheers up considerably in these scenes, but Aldo shows the same uncomprehending amiability towards the girl that Antonioni's men always display in the face of happiness. While he goes to get a doctor, Andreina hurries to the mirror in her scarf and cotton nightdress and squeaks at her reflection. 'Look at you! Lips and skin the colour of a lemon. My mother was right, it just doesn't do to be alone . . . ' Then she sits up in bed and suggests to him: Let's do something gay!' Aldo, of course, has no appropriate ideas.

Very much overshadowed by Andreina's voluminous personality, Aldo appears characterless in contrast. He sees two policemen approaching along the road outside, and runs like a common criminal, on the tenuous assumption that they are after him for bullying a doctor into looking at Andreina. When she catches up with him (she looks so healthy that one must assume it is several days later), he is sitting by a shack on the estuary mud-flats (the scene is particularly evocative of 'Gente del Pô', contemplating the worn leather of his shoes as if he is ready to eat them. Inside the shack, a fish is being cooked over a fire. Aldo is still remarkably clean-shaven, but his environment speaks of near savagery. To remind us that Irma has driven him to this (and not just, in case we may be tempted to think so, his own perverse melancholy), there follows the superbly Antonionian spectacle of Andreina and himself



'. . . by implication a social as well as an emotional outcast . . .' — Steve Cochran, with Mirna Girardi, in 'Il Grido'.

standing in medium long-shot on entirely barren mud-flats, with only a couple of decoy ducks for company. (I haven't yet quite fathomed what the ducks are doing there; they could be (1) emphasising the abandoned state of the human driftwood beside them, (2) an ironic comment on the lack of food, (3) a picturesque addition to the shot, or (4) a combination of all three. I like them.) Continually looking in different directions, as usual, they talk. Andreina (whose incongruous long coat, with its tattered vanity of a fur collar, makes her look like Momina in the 'Le Amiche' beach scene) tells Aldo he doesn't enjoy life. With unusual volubility, Aldo responds amiably to the irritable accusation, and embarks upon reminiscence. He recalls how he first met Irma at a dance; 'There was one girl, her name was Irma, who didn't want to dance, so we went to the museum at Ferrara instead.' Andreina wants to know what happened then, but Aldo has reached the point of his story and goes no further. Andreina gesticulates in exasperation at the misty heavens; 'That's the sort of thing that drives me mad. You begin to talk and then you stop — just when you please. You couldn't hold down a job with that attitude.' Aldo tells her she has got it wrong, and describes, for our benefit as much as for hers, the important position he held at the sugar refinery: 'I was one of the rare ones with fixed employment: when I looked at the land around me from the top of the tower it was as if it all belonged to me . . . . I could see my house, and even my daughter playing in the yard.' The subject of Rosina silences him and he disappears into his own thoughts, but Andreina catches the theme and, like an instrument with a musical phrase, leads it off at a tangent. It is one of Antonioni's most beautiful orchestrations. 'I'd love to have a daughter,' she says, 'I was pregnant once, but something went wrong; if it hadn't, things could have been fine. I suppose I'll get married some day, God knows when . . . ' Then she, too, goes into a dream, and there is a final long-shot before the scene fades on this twofold contemplation of a desert: it is the most eloquent picture in all Antonioni's films of a void between separate individuals, and between the individual and his own desires.

Undeterred by a notice which says 'No money, no food', Andreina tries to get credit out of a local café-owner, who eyes her speculatively but doesn't come across with any provisions. So she departs, marching in time to the music from his radio, in a shot which for sheer pleasure keeps her visible for a while through a crack in the door. The matter of accommodation is easily solved, but the food problem is serious. In a smokey hut, with rain coming in through the roof, Aldo says: 'Lets do nothing', but Andreina is sick of this negative attitude and she goes off into the night to get food as she has always managed

to do in the past — by paying for it with herself. The café-owner turns out to appreciate this form of bargaining. In Aldo, however, unreasoning possessiveness is still lurking; he flings aside a half-smoked cigarette (the gesture of a film-star but not of a hard-up workman) and goes in pursuit of Andreina, battering on the café doors when he sees the lights are out. From inside the place we see her run to let him in, and they argue in long-shot at the door; he tries forcibly to make her leave, but she rages at him: 'Who do you think you are? You're not the only one with troubles!' When he has gone, her silhouette droops by the panes of glass; the idea of her being enclosed irrevocably in the shadows is an image which recurs in the trilogy (with, for instance, the final shot of Valentina-. She goes to collect her coat, tells the café-owner to go to the devil, and leaves, dragging her coat behind her — another theatrical gesture which rings false. For a change, the emphasis in this break-up is on the woman's reaction, but it is her independence which, like Irma's, has driven Aldo again to damn himself by using force. And so for Aldo there is no salvation in optimism.

Since he can sink no lower, Aldo retraces his steps. On the way back to Goriano, huddled in the back of a lorry like a sack of rubbish, he finds himself being drawn in to Virginia's filling-station. There is a double-take when she sees him, but her face is then blank, without pleasure, without malice. 'Still searching?' she asks. He goes to collect his suitcase (which has subsequently disappeared by the time he gets to Goriano) and finds her father is back with her again; the old man would not stay in the Home, and Virginia now has no reason to reject him. The old man takes a furtive drink after Aldo has left the room; it is as if nothing had ever changed. Virginia says there has been a postcard for him from Irma, something about Rosina, but she can't remember the details. He shakes her — 'I've got to know' — but again violence gets him nowhere and his brief outburst fades into impassivity. He gets into the back of the lorry and the filling-station is left behind in a shot which exactly balances the shot with which he first arrived there. He doesn't look back at Virginia, in fact he moves forward out of camera range as her figure dwindles into the past.

Aldo gets to Goriano as a demonstation is taking place; an acquaintance, who greets him without surprise, explains: 'They're taking our land for a jet air-base. Why Goriano, I don't understand. We are going to make a complaint to the authorities.' The complaint is in the form of a great deal of undisciplined running about, through which Aldo moves purposefully on his own mission. He dodges police cordons and avoids the rather unconvincing movements of the crowds. I don't think this half-hearted gesture of social realism on Antonioni's part can be taken very seriously. It is a mild comment on the destruction and turmoil caused by Progress, such as creeps in at the edges of all his films, but here it serves primarily the very useful purpose of emphasising Aldo's complete detachment from everyday concerns. His complaint may be, although he does not know it, against new attitudes of mind, the uprising is a futile display of violence like his own outbreaks, but the parallel does not bear being carried too far. Aldo's problem is the opposite of social, and his tragedy is of interest only to himself.

The distinction is even more apparent after he spots Rosina letting herself in to one of the houses, and sees through the window Irma (whose new hairstyle interestingly recalls that of Edera), and a baby which she is holding; he turns away and moves off into the crowds, but his destination is not theirs — it is the sugar refinery. From Irma's viewpoint inside the house we see him turn and she quickly passes the baby over to a servant and hurries after him, thus reversing the film's first sequence when he pursued her. Aldo walks slowly through the deserted refinery (the workers have all left to join the riot, despite the assertions by their boss that 'It's for the National Defence'), and again from Irma's viewpoint we see him through wire netting — a sinister shot. A track with Aldo ends without him in a pan up the tower, which fills the screen. Without expression, he advances up its stairs, pausing to look out over the view he described to Andreina; as a symbolic touch, the fields visible in the distance are on fire. Below him, Irma calls and Aldo is back face to face with the first intimation he received that his life had ended.

There is no mistake about suicide number two. At the top of the tower Aldo sways and falls. He does not obviously throw himself off. Why should he? It is not of his own volition that his life is over. The camera is on Irma the woman who destroyed him, as he falls; the cry she gives (whence the film gets its title) is the voice partly of his own agony, partly of her recognition of responsibility. From high above we see her crouch beside his body as if in prayer beside a crucified figure; then the camera pans round to show people running far away past the refinery gates, remotely concerned with matters about which Aldo and Irma have no knowledge and no caring. The Fusco music which began the film, a macabre waltz with accordion and xylophone themes, brings it to its close.

Perhaps 'L'Avventura' and 'La Notte' help somewhat to explain 'Il Grido', which might achieve a greater success if shown in Italy today than when it first came out. I would say that 'Il Grido' is a more pessimistic film, more full of despair, which may be due to the fact that I myself, at that particular moment in my life, was in a certain state of depression. If the film didn't reflect this, I'd be really surprised.' Not long after Antonioni made these observations, 'Il Grido' was reissued in Italy: he was right. The film ran for six weeks in Milan and did excellent business in Rome in mid-summer, an unfavourable time for the cinema and certainly, one would have thought, an unseasonal moment for Aldo's wintry tale. As well as being the only one of Antonioni's films to interpret the ravages of love from a masculine point of view, 'Il Grido' reaches an unrivalled depth of misery, two points which imply again a close sympathy between Aldo and his creator. That Monica Vitti restored Antonioni to a more balanced mournfulness (he met her when she was dubbing Virginia for 'Il Grido') is very tempting conclusion to be made from the, by comparison, more light-hearted mood of the trilogy. Aldo has not yet reappeared in Antonioni's films; although all the main men in the trilogy show signs of panic at being abandoned by their women, none of them exists at quite Aldo's level of emotional intensity.

Aldo is a strange mixture of dog-like devotion and extravagant sensitivity. Presumably only an Italian workman can tell us if such as Aldo are often palely loitering in the Pô valley district; it certainly seems unlikely that Antonioni, despite his careful researches, can have got inside the skin of the class Aldo is supposed to represent. For a start, Irma does not fit into the scheme of peasant life; she is about as far from the other villagers (not that we see much of them) as is the vacillating wife of Philippe Noiret from the rowdy, raucous, and very real inhabitants of 'La Pointe-Courte'. Even assuming one can picture one of these wives or, again, one of the women in 'La Terra Trema', being permitted to give up her husband in the first place, it is even less easy to imagine her being given the luxury of deserting his successor. Aldo, by rights should have hammered Irma into the ground before dragging her off to the altar. Yet after a slap or two he gives up, because she says everything is over. That she should be concerned about abstract matters like losing face and that he should put her feelings higher than his own at such a time implies a sentimentality very alien to rustic common sense.

The trouble is quickly diagnosed. Says Antonioni: 'I am preoccupied with making middle-class dramas.' Everybody in 'Il Grido' thinks too much. The film doesn't work because Aldo should be up there with Sandro and the others, where people have the leisure to indulge their psychoses and don't feel the need to complain about the building of jet air-fields (which are to their benefit) unless their sleep is in danger of being disturbed. He and Irma are much more comprehensible if one puts them in the context of 'La Notte'; in the setting of 'Il Grido' they are just Giovanni in cloth cap and Lidia in shawl. In implicitely attacking the moral attitude which drives heroic Aldo to his death, Antonioni is anticipating the way Claudia twice has the ground cut from beneath her feet by intellectual developments for which she is morally unprepared. In sending Aldo in search of what he has lost — a permanent liaison — Antonioni is anticipating the attempt by Vittoria to find a love that survives definition.

That his cast was international, that he had to bully them and trick them into giving him what he wanted, and that his characters have more in common with his adulthood in Rome than with his childhood at Ferrara, did not prevent him from hammering 'Il Grido' into symmetrical and unified shape. The almost operatic result, the nearest he has got to the sentimental neo-realism of 'Bicycle Thieves', is also the nearest he has got to 'Ossessione', with its picturesque seaminess, its romantically raw emotions, its unwashed but otherwise recognisable film-stars. Antonioni is not, by very nature, competing with De Sica, but he easily outdoes Visconti because his visual effects are not baroque merely for the sake of it and his characters endure more than superficial wounds. The lonely groups in the Pô valley represent real distress on the mud-flats of a real society. Scenes such as the attempts to win back Irma, the betrayal of Rosina, and the active loneliness of Andreina, have a universal validity of feeling. It is a matter of script and a matter of staging, it is the subtle and the obvious in disturbing alliance, it is nearly inhuman melancholy in a human context, and it is human passion set in melodramatic fantasy. There is a lot wrong with 'Il Grido' — the time was very fully out of joint when it was made; but even in his depths Antonioni has hypnotic grandeur, and a style rich with irrespressible ingenuity. It was an ingenuity, as we shall now see, for which he had to thank 'Le Amiche', and it was a richness which, as we have seen, was to transform 'L'Avventura' the triumph that might never have taken place had not 'Il Grido' bridged the gap between the discovery and the assertion of Antonioni's identity as a director.

LE AMICHE: the key

LE Amiche' is perhaps the least exhibitionistic of Antonioni's films and its supreme efficiency has been too much overlooked as a result. In the context of 1955, a year otherwise of creative bankruptcy in Italian cinema, the film merits all possible superlatives; although in the context of Antonioni's career as seen from 1963 it appears a finely polished gem in a whole string of cinematic jewels, a distinguished setting not quite so much to its advantage.

To class 'Le Amiche' simply as a rehearsal for the trilogy would however do it very inadequate justice. It was made a year before Antonioni actually gave voice to the ecstatic gloom of 'Il Grido', but since the story of Aldo was planned in 1954 it is not surprising that 'Le Amiche' is more in the mood of 'L'Avventura'. It is not obsessively bleak, its temperature is sometimes as warm as Antonioni has ever permitted himself to get, and its outlook is emphatically a feminist one. Nevertheless it is unique among Antonioni's films in that it was not originally written by the director himself; it is an adaptation (by Suso Cecchi D'Amico, who worked out the scenario by day, and Alba de Cespédès, who wrote the dialogues at night, — the two hardly ever met during the course of their collaboration) of 'Tra Donne Sole' (Among Lonely Women), one of the stories in Cesare Pavese's 'La Bella Estate'.

The connection with Pavese is an important colour in the Antonioni spectrum. In 1955 at the age of forty-seven Cesare Pavese committed suicide. He was a writer obsessed with many of the subjects now associated with Antonioni; his stories involve, much as did his own life, a succession of unsatisfactory, overbearing, often ruinous romantic exploits, in which women appear parasitical upon the constant masculine need for their sex. Pavese regarded love, the readiest panacea for so many ills, as too toxic a drug to be taken with safety, yet he acknowledged that to take it is as compulsive as adrenalin itself. The intolerable conflict between what he did not want and what he had to have Pavese resolved by suicide. He was too honest in his convictions to make the kind of compromise Momina exerts in 'Tra Donne Sole', involving a cold spiritual aloofness from physical liaisons; rather than so to prostitute his aspirations to complete independence from the destructive influences of womankind, he took, after a truly Augustinian session of self-martyrdom, Rosetta's way out. He left behind him the statement: 'One does not kill oneself for love of a woman; one kills oneself because love, any love, reveals us in our nakedness, in our want, in our defencelessness, in our emptiness.'

This policy of giving up the ghost rather than living with it is fortunately more than an adolescent extreme. It is the measure of an unbalanced mind, true enough, but the balance has been disturbed not by animal but by intellectual forces. The eclipse of feeling by the cold shadow of reason ('too much talk takes the meaning out of words') brings on the darkness which haunts, for instance, the father who sees his daughter merely as an interesting psychological case in 'Through a Glass Darkly'. Unlike Bergman, Pavese could not defy the abstract concept called Love and thereby illuminate his murky existence. Instead, with that peculiarly Italian Jansenist scorn for the traditional canons of the Church, he decided over twenty-five years ago that the main concern of each (implicitly agnostic) individual is 'how to destroy one's aloneness and communicate with others'.

The problem of communication; the matter of personal identity; the fascination of the female. Antonioni's films handle these subjects again and again. In moral confusion his characters struggle for lucidity only to find (when at last, like Clara and Claudia at the end of their stories and Vittoria at the beginning of hers, they are seeing clearly) that confusion had more in it to live for. And when Rosetta, Aldo, and Anna reach this discovery, each after tramping much the same arduous path, they haven't the guts, the strength, or the desire respectvely to go back for another try. They are true Pavesians.

The parallel is intriguing. It shows another link between Antonioni and the pre-war Italian fatalists who greeted Mussolini without enthusiasm, shows him in tune with a more than economic Depression and with the guilt-complex that was intensified by the Occupation. It demonstrates that Antonioni's integral connection with the neo-realists is one of conscience, and that his modern conscience represents its continuation — something no other director of his generation managed to do successfully. 'La Dolce Vita' may howl, but in comparison with 'L'Avventura' it is tilting at windmills; it may allude to earlier (and better) Fellini, but this still leaves it a long way from the apposite truths of 'La Notte'. In confining himself to a consistent point of view ('I am a product of a middle class society and am preoccupied with making middle class dramas'), Antonioni has almost unconsciously recorded the subsequent progress of the philosophy Pavese expressed in 1937 in his book on the torments of being alive. And he admits the connection: 'If it is true that I'm a secular artist, it's also true that I'm part of a cultural

radition, both in literature and in the cinema. Svevo, for instance, was a secular writer; so was Pavese. The Italian silent and pre-war cinemas were secular. There has always been this minority in Italy.'

'Il Grido' brings the philosophy up to date. Aldo is the most typically Pavesian of all Antonioni's characters, and significantly he is the most dejected. For with the exception of 'Il Grido' Antonioni's films mitigate Pavese's dour doctrine by never entirely abandoning hope. As Antonioni has said: "Pavese killed himself, but I am still living..." It is surely academic to argue (as does Leprohon's biography of Antonioni) that the director's emphasis on the superiority of his female characters is a reversal of the writer's antagonism towards women (the basic theme of incompatibilty remains the same); a perverse determination to survive is the most important adjunct Antonioni has made to the Pavesian structure of his films. Sandro's infidelity kills the ecstacy of Claudia's love, but her shell of a body, with that eternal strength which seems to come from nowhere, forgives him. He, in his demands upon the female sex, is the Pavese belligerence personified; she, with her unfounded courage to endure the collapse of her beliefs and to make some kind of fresh beginning, represents that spark of warmth which gives Antonioni's tragedies their greatness. It is the warmth of Scot Fitzgerald, again, and, it transfigures for instance the scene in 'Le Amiche' when Nene and Lorenzo, anticipating 'L'Avventura' and 'La Notte', are re-united; to these two, rather as to the couple in Fitzgerald's beautiful story 'The Lees of Happiness', 'life had come quickly and gone, leaving not bitterness, but pity; not disillusion, but only pain.' Antonioni is not quite so sentimental, but his compassion is quite as deep.

'Le Amiche', then, is not a close interpretation of Pavese's original story; in fact, with 'Signora senza camelie', it is paradoxically the least obviously Pavesian of Antonioni's films. It follows the course of four relationships simultaneously; each case echoes another in Antonioni's work. Clelia is of the same school as Irma and Vittoria; Momina is a tough Machiavellian version of Patrizia; Nene is another of the long-suffering, infinitely wronged, incontinently forgiven women like Clara, Claudia and Lidia; Rosetta is a young and starry-eyed equivalent of Anna, but with the difference that she is incapable of attempting to bridge the gulf between romantic fiction and reality. In the margin is Mariella, an embryo Giulia in superficiality and spite and another Eedera in animal self-centredness.

The five women are shown to be superior to their menfolk either in strength of will or in goodness of heart to a degree that would impress a praying mantis. Clelia, whose activities give the film its symmetry, comes from the same slum area of Turin as Carlo, but while he has only become a decorator she has acquired sophistication, authority, and in turn a job with responsibilities. She is as independent as Vittoria in 'L'Eclisse' (although her tastes are not quite so esoteric), and like her, Clelia needs to have a man about the place. She picks on Carlo as the likeliest looking specimen, and (to do her justice) gets quite fond of him. Several things, however, contribute to the downfall of their affair; foremost is the fact that Carlo is about as dumb as he looks. Except in the physical sense, Clelia is much more than he can handle.

Their uneven attributes are emphasised by Antonioni from their first meeting, when Carlo is unable to cope with Clelia's annoyance at the discouraging unfinished appearance of the salon. She rushes him off to the nearest telephone (in a café across the street) to contact the architect she has come to Rome to supervise, and while she fumes up and down beside the counter Carlo has a chat with the café cashier, a girl more in his line. Then Cesare the architect arrives, oozing charm even before we see his face, and Carlo becomes part of the background. He tags amiably along as they go back to the salon, Cesare churning out compliments with imperturbable ease while she, with equal ease, refuses to melt. Back at the salon she issues orders while Cesare plays with a light bulb (significant — he is like one himself)

'... the fascination of the female ...' — Valentina Cortese, Yvonne Furneaux, and Eleonora Rossi-Drago in 'Le Amiche'.

and makes promises; mesmerised, Carlo is little more than a shadow in the corner.

It is surprising to learn a little later in the film, therefore, that Clelia has already got her eye on Carlo. The fact that she is far too self-possessed to be swept off her feet by Cesare's neon grin and facile display of manners puts her so clearly in a class above him that his mere assistant seems even less likely to be of interest to her. But when Carlo goes off for a snack while she is supposed to be signing a receipt for a mirror that has just arrived she refers the delivery man to Cesare and hurries in pursuit. In the cheap little restaurant they go to a man is complaining about the food, but for Clelia (as Thirard points out) the squalour of the place adds to its charm. For Carlo it is just a place where he can eat cheaply. Antonioni makes the point further with the business of the 'suppli'; these are small cakes of rice and cheese, infinitely low class, which Clelia discovers on the counter. They delight her much as Continental slums delight the American tourist, but Carlo thinks she is pleased because they appeal to her gastronomically and so he dutifully buys her some. In her small grimace of horror when he isn't looking is expressed the world of differences underlying their surface of compatibility.

At the table, Clelia talks about Rosetta. She plans to give a girl who tried to kill herself in the hotel room next to Clelia's a job at the salon. With earthy pessimism Carlo profoundly, and with particular truth in this case, observes: 'People who only work as a past-time will never achieve anything' — which expresses typical working-class envy of those who land cushy jobs without even trying. This awkward turn in the conversation is halted by the arrival of Cesare with Mariella in tow and a message from Momina whom Clelia has met through Rosetta. Clelia is to go with them on a picnic party to the seaside (Carlo is not included). As the two depart again, Cesare munching some food he has openly removed from a passing tray, Mariella asks about Carlo, which emphasises that it is his physical appearance that women in general, and therefore probably Clelia in particular, go for.

Then follows the picnic outing, that mathematically planned sequence of choreographic movements on the wintry shore which is one of Antonioni's most perfect pieces of film-craft. The loneliness and depression of Rosetta as she burst into tears in the train home is in keeping with Clelia's own sentiments; she has been a little out of things during the picnic shots — Antonioni keeps her on the fringe of Momina's group, and the slight awkwardness of her position (with no man around to run after, and not as yet a very close acquaintanceship with the other women) makes the occasion nearly as much torture for her as it is for everybody else. So she goes to tell Carlo, who she knows will be sympathetic, that it has been a terrible day, arriving plus music (on the ball as ever, Fusco quickly gets the mood romantic) just as Carlo and an associate are congratulating themselves on a hard day's work. The associate leaves, and Clelia, suddenly forgetting her exhaustion, moves in on Carlo while the camera edges closer. 'Are you afraid of your boss?' she asks, ironically leaving no doubt as to who's in charge here. It seems that Carlo, off duty, is not afraid. Their clinch, however, is not intended to kid anyone that shoes and rice are round the corner. For the salon around them is bare, blank, and patchy . . . .

This is as warm if you can call it warm as their relationship becomes. When we next meet Clelia and Carlo the chill is already setting in. They go off to choose furniture for the salon and in a fast track along a street arcade we are shown that the matter of different tastes is quickly becoming an unsurmountable barrier. Clelia doesn't even need to see the particular furniture Carlo is keen on when she sees what's outside the shop he takes her to; she knows, and they are surrounded by gloomy, heavy wardrobes and chairs as she tells him so, that it is not what she has in mind. As they argue they pass a window with wedding bouquets on display; and in Clelia's glance we see the realisation that a marriage with Carlo would provoke strenuous disagreement again and again. The scene changes to a poorer area of Turin, where it seems that Clelia, now making a sentimental return journey, was born and grew up. It is an area Carlo knows well too, and seeing Clelia in her fine clothes looking incongruous in the middle of it he begins to detect for the first time the gulf that exists between them despite their identical background. A morose little woman in black passes them and Clelia is somewhat perturbed. 'I know her when she was young and newly married'. Years in this place haven't done much for her. Carlo could offer Clelia little better. 'We might have met here,' he says thoughtfully, 'if you hadn't moved away.' Clelia and he both see what that moving away has meant to her freedom. The scene ends with them separating rather distantly at the corner of a wall; Carlo goes off in one direction. Clelia takes another. This parting-of-ways symbolism is used again by Antonioni for the break between Rosetta and Lorenzo; for Clelia the angle of departure is appropriately less acute but a certain finality cannot help but get through to the audience.

The doomed affair drifts on. A day or so later Clelia is choosing mannequins at the salon

"... who pairs with whom ..." — Cesare and Mariella in 'Le Amiche'.

when she notices one of the applicants getting on rather too well with Carlo. She immediately dismisses her along with the other rejects as Carlo is passing, then relents her gesture of spite and tells the girl she can stay. She goes to explain half-jokingly to Carlo that she was jealous but he is deliberately concentrating on an unconstructive phone call and she gets so little response out of him that we can sense immediately the extent of the rift between them. But things get warmer unexpectedly; Carlo leaves a good luck note for Clelia's opening display at the salon and this adds to her sense of well-being at the success of the function. Then Rosetta kills herself, Clelia in a storm of remorse insults Momina and row of customers ('It's your fault as much as anybody's'), thus putting herself out on a limb again, and Carlo phones when she is in tears on her bed, for the endearing reason that he 'wanted to hear your voice'. They fix a meeting, but on her way out, Clelia runs into the manageress of the syndicate of fashion salons that employs her. She is not out of a job as she expected to be; instead the manageress suggests that Clelia gets away from it all, and tells her she can (if she wishes) return to work at the branch in Rome.

Clelia the career woman, the level-headed, eminently sensible and efficient personality, bubbles to the surface. Almost without thinking she turns away from the newly arrived Carlo to buy a ticket on a train leaving for Rome that very evening. We realise how close she had come to taking a fatal step — that of relinquishing her individuality in an effort to make her affair with Carlo work. She explains to him in the hotel bar: 'It's too late for me to get married — I'm too independent. Perhaps some day I will meet the man I can marry without giving myself up, and without needing him to give up himself.' Carlo stands blank-faced as ever as she goes off to pack; they have arranged to meet at the station but when she arrives to catch her train he hides from her. The mood of this last scene is a little unclear (getting little help from Ettore Manni's lack of expression) but Antonioni's implication seems to be that Clelia's resolution could crack even now, to judge from her attempt to contact Carlo by phone. However Carlo, not wishing to play second fiddle in a big departure scene, sees her off without giving her the chance to change her mind.

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which Clelia's last conversation with Carlo is the expression, is the same as the one that is never actually put into words in 'L'Eclisse' between Vittoria and Piero. The attraction is physical and it can get no further. Clelia does not get much joy, in fact, out of the liaison from start to finish; the compulsion which drives her to Carlo in moments of distress is little better than the need for a masculine shoulder to cry on. She likes it when he looks at her while she is touching up her hair-do in the mirror in the street, but otherwise the couple get no apparent pleasure out of each other at all. Vittoria and Piero, Claudia and Sandro, even Rosetta and the morose Lorenzo, manage to enjoy themselves in the summer of their respective discontents, but Clelia and Carlo scarcely rake up a smile between them. Clelia is thus shown by Antonioni to be of the same basic nature as Momina, only one level higher. The faint triangle discernable between Clelia, Carlo, and the model who flirts, corresponds to that between Momina, Cesare, and Mariella. Momina is as hard as nails; Clelia's outburst after Rosetta's death is a fine piece of description: 'You don't know what feelings are. If a man leaves you, you look for another one.' Her seduction of Cesare, which contrives to ridicule him before the decks are cleared, demonstrates the bored, interfering, and cruel personality which Clelia's could become.

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background as Rosetta skips round the unresponsive figure of her Lorenzo as Claudia dances round Sandro in 'L'Avventura'. Here too, the mood is destroyed by the man's complete inability to respond to it. Rosetta suggests buying something at a street stall, but Lorenzo, rubbing an eyelash out of his eye, doesn't care for sweets. Her enthusiastic query about what love does for his system he parries with the suggestion, which she takes as a joke (he doesn't): 'Perhaps I've never been in love.' But when he refuses to come with her to Clelia's opening fashion display, where he knows Rosetta will provoke a showdown with Nene, Rosetta begins to get the point and becomes silent and withdrawn.

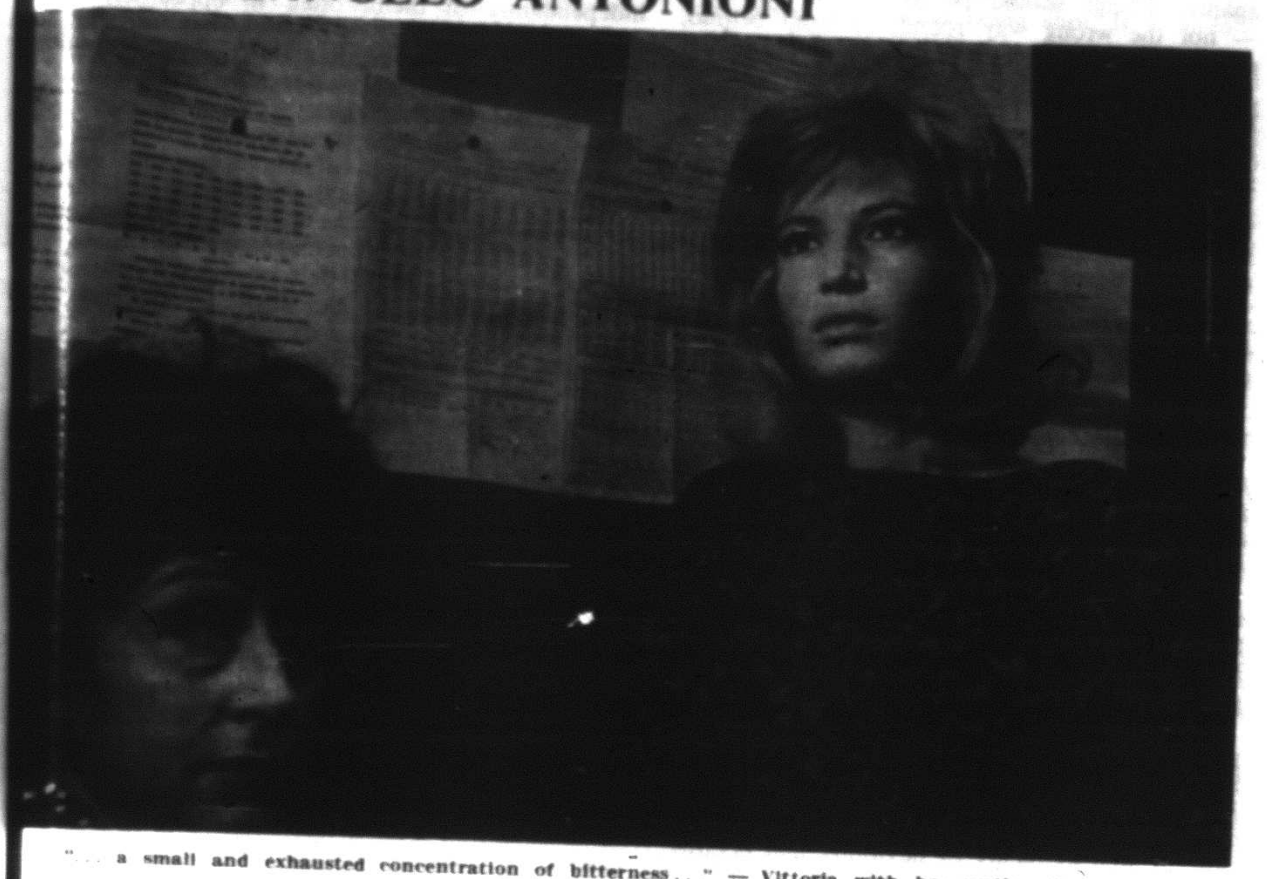
She has to face Nene on her own, in a scene constantly interrupted by Clelia's mannequins rushing past to change. Nene tries to explain, from her own experience of Lorenzo's kind of fidelity, what he is like: 'You are not everything to him.' But for his sake she is prepared to consider that Rosetta will mean happiness for him. With all the fatalistic generosity of the Antonionian woman she will let him go. 'Perhaps you have achieved what I have been striving for in vain. If we had children I would fight, but we are alone and only love can hold us together.' From their helpless alliance in the cause of masculine insensibility, Antonioni cuts ironically to the main attraction in Clelia's display — a wedding gown. It is a subject which provokes the penultimate development in the affair, when Cesare designs on a bit of paper a wedding dress for Mariella in the café they have all gone to for a celebration. Jealous of the architect, even jealous of Nene, as well as edgy because Rosetta has told her more than he ever intended, Lorenzo lets fly with his general irritation ('I'm not joking with society idols who have failed — I'm disgusted with you all.') and leaves. After a long look at Nene, who has sense enough to let him go, Rosetta, who hasn't, runs after him. She catches up at the corner of the street all set to calm him down with endearments, and instead encounters Armageddon. He tells her the truth — 'I don't need anybody' (not strictly true — he doesn't, at that moment, *want* to need anybody), and with that point made he tramps away. Rosetta is too young to put his anger into perspective, just as she was too young to see Lorenzo clearly in the first place. Her ill-defined hopes and dreams shattered in a single catastrophic encounter with fact, she reels off down the deep well of the street like a leaf falling from a tree. The gloom fades into a harsh long-shot of the river side, where in a blaze of white (signifying death as in Agnes Varda's 'Cleo') a loaded stretcher is being put into an ambulance. Then the camera prowls up from the water's edge as a police officer picks Rosetta's coat from the ground. In two shots, Antonioni says all that is necessary.

Finally, the reunion. Nene comes into her apartment like an automaton, and from the floor above we see Lorenzo call her. She ignores him. He comes down to her and although she tries to move away he hangs on to her with a gesture of despair and a plea: 'Don't leave me.' Gradually, tearfully, Nene thaws, and as he buries his head in her lap, she rests her head on his shoulder. The proximity of their bodies gives their necessity for each other more emphasis than in the final scene, otherwise identical in spirit, of 'L'Avventura'; and Nene puts into words, with her reply to Lorenzo's 'Why do you still love me?', what Claudia's forgiveness can only imply. 'Perhaps because you have cost me so much,' she says.

'Le Amiche' was the turning point in Antonioni's career. Although he himself doesn't like too much to be made of his links with Pavese, I think it is undeniable that in 'Tra Donne Sole' and what his two feminine scriptwriters made of it and what he made of it after them, Antonioni found what his first films where looking for. There was some of the guilt and intrigue of 'Cronaca', the fatalistic woman's-eye view and the class-problem of 'Signora', and the opportunity to make use of lessons learned on location for 'I Vinti' and from the research for 'Tentato Suicidio'. In addition, he picked for himself a fine team of actresses, who revealed to him, perhaps for the first time, that an expressive face does not have to look as blank as Eisenstein believed. Above all, it was a subject he chose for himself (the first time for four years), and for a change he was not too cramped for money, time, or intention. And he had the technical experience to go with it. He could, and he did, extract precisely what he wanted from the personalities of his cast, from the movement of his camera, from the editing of his scenes. If 'L'Avventura' was a triumph of love, 'Le Amiche' was a triumph of ambition and discovery.

'L' Avventura' was for many people a revelation. Yet 'Le Amiche' has attracted nowhere near the same attention for all that it deals with the same subject, and that of 'L'Eclisse' besides. It is the neglected key to Antonioni's work; a deep, delicate, and compassionate film, setting out almost in cameo form each of his favourite themes. As exposition, it confirms perhaps more satisfyingly than do any other of his films, Antonioni's claim: 'I understand man with his faults and his virtues, but I love, first and foremost, women. I understand them better.'

MICHELANGELO ANTONIONI



"... a small and exhausted concentration of bitterness..." — Vittoria with her mother in "L'Eclisse".

IN my descriptions of Antonioni's films I have endeavoured to show the course followed by the main action of each film, the meanings behind that action, and the methods adopted by Antonioni to make his meanings clear. Whereas this will, I hope, have given a reasonable idea of what Antonioni brings to and requires of the film medium, I think the most enlightening way in which a summary can be given of his methods and intentions is to let the director speak for himself. Very much more has been published about him on the Continent than in this country; I have accordingly drawn the quotes which follow from interviews reported in French and Italian journals of the last few years. These interviews and encounters reveal a reserved but phenomenal personality, a formidable natural talent, and a widely-read, widely probing intelligence. They reveal a complete dedication to the cinema as a means of artistic expression and social comment. They reveal a profound humanitarian concern with the psychological facts and fictions of the nuclear age. And they reveal a director whose greatness lies in all these qualities, who is unique for the films he has made from them.

In *Cinema Nuovo*, No. 38:

In speaking of my film 'Il Grido', the French critics thought up a new formula: 'interior' neo-realism. I had never considered giving a name to what for me has always been a necessity — looking into a man to see what emotions and what thoughts make him act as he does on his road to happiness or to death. I have never even worried about 'themes' to introduce into a film. I loathe 'message' films. I simply try to tell, or more precisely, to show, certain vicissitudes and I hope that they capture the interest in spite of the bitterness that comes from them. Life is not always gay, and one must have the courage to look at it from all angles. But the finished film itself should reveal its meaning. If the ideas are in our minds, and if we are sincere in our telling of the story, they will always make themselves felt in the end. The important thing is that the story must be founded on a warm and balanced consciousness. The cinema I like is that in which the images bring a sense of reality without losing their power of persuasion, without infatuation, or delirium, or intellectual extrav-

agance. Things should be seen from the front — not the wrong way round, or from behind, or obliquely.

I am very scared of the public and even of the critics. I wish I could warn them, explain a whole lot of things to them before they see one of my films. Somebody once said, and he was perfectly right, that books ought to be judged like criminals, by a magistrate and before a jury, and that accusation and defence should be heard. I feel that way about films.

In *Gazette du Cinema*, No. 4 (1950); speaking of 'Cronaca di un Amore':

The only influences I am aware of here are those of 'Les Dames du Bois de Boulogne' and 'Loulou', by Pabst; and Lucia Bosè, my principal actress, is indeed quite near, in her acting as well as her performanuce, to Louise Brooks.

It was my own idea to film numerous sequences of my film without any cuts; I felt this was compulsory, and I think indeed that it is something intensely necessary in the present state of evolution in the cinema.

What really separates me from the other Italian directors is that I give priority to the directing of the actors. Gesture alone matters to me; in it lies the actor's whole performance. So I choose actors with a great mobility of expression, as well as plenty of flexibility and docility, and I direct them entirely from the outside by indicating their movements and their attitudes. I made no demands upon the intelligence of Lucia Bosè; I controlled her like a puppet.

Some people have criticised me for the number of dresses and hats she wore and their luxurious quality; but apart from the fact that this array of costumes is justified by the social status of the character, each dress was thought out in minute detail according to the sequence in which it was to appear — like the settings, each was kept subordinate to the evolution of the characters' sentiments, which remains my primary concern.

In *Cinema Nuovo*, March, 1954; speaking of 'I Vinti':

I wanted to limit myself to the telling of three episodes which seemed to me to be symptomatic of a particularly painful situation, and from which a moral could be drawn afterwards but not before. The important thing for me was to get down the facts, to be brief. But a film must be judged in itself, not so much on the ethical or moral as on the aesthetic level. And not too much attention should be paid to the arguments put forward by the author. The personality of the film is developed independently of them, often in opposition to them.

I have also been accused of formalism. The accusation implies a relationship between intentions and results which is not for me to judge; however, it seems undeniable to me that my films are in search of themes that are current, specific, and burning. I might even flatter myself I was one of the first to change the subject of the Italian documentary from things to people with 'Gente del Pô and 'Nettezza Urbana'. It seems to me my unquestionable right is next to try and express myself in, as it were, more beautiful writing. Besides, it is only to give more power to my subject. To want to do the opposite would lead to a paradox: 'beautiful films can only be made with ugly images'.

For the French episode (my favourite) we had to cut down trees, plant others, lighten the grass of a meadow, darken the leaves of a shrub, fake scenery with the help of projectors — in short, to 'create' a wood. Can this be accused of formalism? It was in the wood that the drama developed and reached its conclusion; this wood was the background to the crime and it had, figuratively, to 'fit in' with the situation.

Many people found the English sketch excellent. But we tried above all to get three different atmospheres, corresponding to the three countries. Finally they said that the film seemed to have been made by three different directors — French, Italian, and English. I take that as a compliment when I think that Renoir has not yet succeeded in giving us a believable picture of America. Only one critic (André Bazin) has recognised in the film, despite its episodic structure, any unity of style.

If the French episode did not entirely satisfy the critics, it is because what I wanted to express in it is not shown sufficiently clearly. It was a question of describing a crime which could have had no plausible jutification, a crime which should appear to have been unprovoked — the tragic as well as absurb conclusion of a country outing by some students. It was difficult to construct from this ambiguity any accurate measure of the relationship between the characters.

In a discussion reported in *Cinema 58* (Sept.—Oct.):

It is obvious, and this is a general truth, that everything that has happened to me in life has encouraged me to invent certain stories rather than others. This I can affirm, but I find it impossible to determine exactly which cinematographic or extra-cinematographic experiences are the ones which contributed to my development. It is difficult to say how a story

s born, how I thought up the subject of 'Cronica di un Amore' or of 'Il Grido'. Films are born as poems are born in the heart of a poet (I am not holding myself up to be a poet, I am just making a comparison). Words, images, concepts, present themselves to the mind, they are all mixed together, and the result is the poem. I believe it is the same for films. Everything we read, feel, think, see, manifests itself in images at a given moment, and from these images the stories are born. Often precise facts suggest these stories, but this happens rarely to me — in fact only once, with 'I vinti'.

n an interveiw at Cannes, 1960:

If you have an enemy, don't seek to do him violence, or insult him, or curse him, or humiliate him, or wish a car-accident upon him. Simply hope that he is put out of work. It is the most horrible affliction that can strike him. No relaxation, however pleasant, has any sense unless it is counterbalanced by fatigue. I consider myself a privileged man in this respect; I do a job which pleases me. I do not know many Italians who could say as much.

In an interview reported in *Cahiers du Cinema*, Oct. 1960:

All the moments in the creation of a film are of equal importance. It is not true that any clear distinction can exist between them. They are all synthesized. Thus, during the planning of the subject, it can happen that you decide on a tracking shot, or that, during shooting, you change a character or a situation, or again that, during the dubbing, you alter one or more vocal responses. For me, from the moment when the first idea comes to me (without any definite form) until the screening of the rushes, making a film means only one single task. I mean that I cannot bring myself to be interested in anything but this film, day and night. This is not to be taken as a romantic attitude; quite the reverse. Rather, I become more lucid, more attentive, I almost have the impression that I am more intelligent and ready to understand.

It is impossible not to recognise that methods of directing are less detailed than they used to be, less elaborate even than they were a few years ago. Technical notes have almost completely disappeared, and dialogue is also no longer predetermined. When I direct, I even go so far as to do without the numbers by which the sections of the script are customarily indicated. Only the continuity girl uses them to make her work easier. This is because it seems more logical to me to ignore scene divisions when the film is being shot. It is already a way of improvisation.

But there is more to it than this. I seldom want to read over a scene the day before it is to be filmed. Sometimes I arrive on the spot and I don't even know what we have got to film. This is the system I prefer, to arrive there at the moment shooting is to start, without preconceived notions, absolutely without preparation. I often ask to be left alone on the location for a quarter of an hour, half an hour, and I let my thoughts wander freely. I limit myself to just looking. I help myself with the things that surround me; they always make suggestions. I have a great feeling for things, perhaps more than for people, but the latter interest me more.

At all events, I find that it is very useful to look at the locations and to feel the atmosphere for a certain time, waiting for characters. It may happen that the images I have before my eyes at that moment coincide with those I had in my mind, but this is not often the case. What most often happens is that the image one is thinking of has something insincere, artificial, about it. This, too, is a way of improvising.

But that is not all. It can also happen that when trying out a scene I suddenly change my mind. Or I change it progressively, as the lights are arranged and I watch the actors moving and talking under this lighting. I believe that it is only then that a scene can really be judged and corrected.

. . . . In the principle of cinema, as in all the arts, one has a choice. As Camus says, it is the revolt of the artist against reality. If one supports this principle, what are the ways in which reality reveals itself? Whether an author in the cinema finds inspiration in a novel, in an actual event, or in fantasy, what counts is how he isolates it, gives it style, and makes it his own. Once he reaches that point, the source is of no further importance. The plot of 'Crime and Punishment' would be, without the form given it by Dostoievsky, of little account. There is an equal chance of making from it a very good film or a very bad one. This is why I nearly always write the subjects of my films myself. One time, I was bowled over by a novel by Pavese. While I was working on it I realised that I was liking it for reasons quite different from those which made me want to film it. And the passages which had interested me most were those which least lent themselves for transposition to the screen. For another thing, it is very difficult to tell a subject in a new way when its first telling was in the most appropriate style for it. I find,

finally, that it is much more simple to invent a story completely. A director is a man, so he has ideas; he is an artist, so he has imagination. Whether they are good or bad, he seems to me to have a pile of stories to tell. And whatever I see, whatever happens to me, continually re-stocks the pile.

. . . . I attach enormous importance to the soundtrack, and I always try to give it the greatest possible care. And when I say soundtrack I refer to the natural sounds, to the sound effects rather than to the music. For 'L'Avventura', I han an enormous number of sound effects recorded; every possible kind of sea sound, rough or calm, breakers, waves booming in caverns, etc. I had a hundred or so reels of tape for the effects alone. Then I selected the ones that are heard on the soundtrack of the film. For me, this is the real music that adapts itself to the images. Music rarely achieves this kind of integration with the image; more often it only lulls the spectator and prevents him from appreciating clearly what he sees. All things considered, I am inclined to be against the 'musical commentary', at least in its current form. I feel there is something old and stale about it. The ideal thing would be to compose a vast soundtrack with noises and get a conductor to direct it; but then wouldn't the only capable conductor be the director himself?

In an interview with *L'Express*, Feb. 1961:

The film actor does not have to understand, he has to be. One might object that in order to be, he must understand. This is not true. If it were, the most intelligent actor would also be the best. Reality often proves the contrary.

When an actor is intelligent, the effort he makes to be a good actor is three times as great, because he wants to go into everything deeply, to take everything into account, even the finest details, and in doing this he strays on to territory that is not his own — indeed he creates his own obstacles. His analysis of his part, which according to general belief ought to lead him to an exact presentation of the character in question, ends only by ruining his work and taking away his spontaneity. He should arrive for shooting in a virgin state of mind. The more intuitive his efforts, the more spontaneous the result will be. He must not work on the psychological level, but on the level of the imagination. And the imagination works of its own accord — there is no switch you can press.

It is not true that there can be close collaboration between the actor and the director. They work on entirely different levels. The director owes the actor no explanation, except general ones on the character and the film. It is dangerous to get down to details. In certain cases, the director and the actor inevitably become enemies. Then director must not compromise himself by revealing his own plans. The actor is a sort of Trojan horse within his citadel.

My favourite method consists of provoking certain results by working in secret. It is a matter of stimulating the possibilities within the actor whose existence he does not realise himself; of exciting not his intelligence, but his instinct; of giving not justifications but illuminations. You can even go so far as trickery with an actor — ask one thing of him in order to obtain another. The director must be able to ask and discern, in what the actor can offer him, between the good and the bad, the useful and the superfluous.

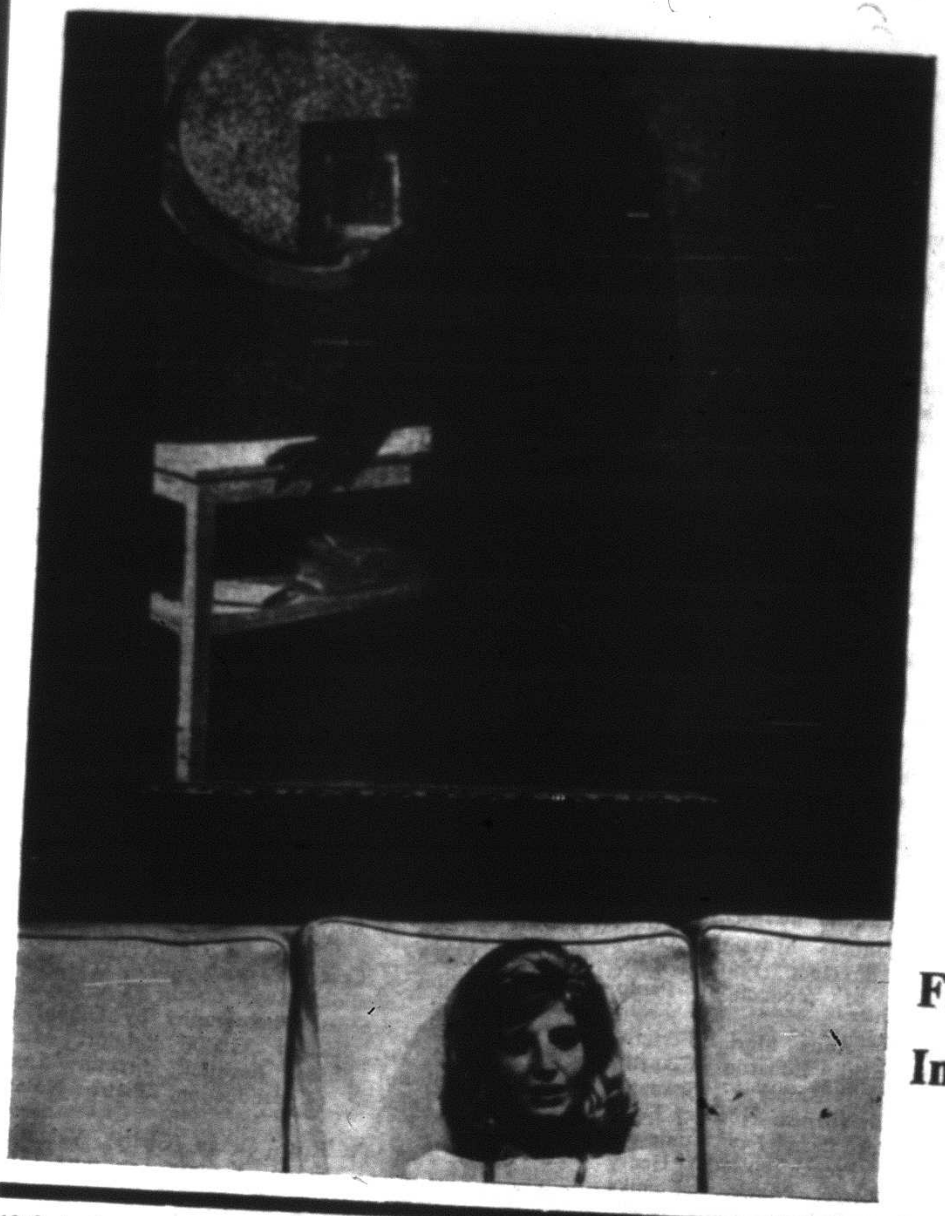
This manner of working might appear paradoxical, but it is the only one which enables a director to get a good result with improvised actors — people who have, as it were, been picked from the street. Neo-realism taught us this. But it is valid too for professional actors, even for the greatest of them.

In an interview reprinted in *Positif*, March, 1962:

'L'Eclisse' deals with solitude and the impossibility of over-coming solitude, with particular reference to a case in which two people could love each other. The story belongs to the future, more than to our own time; for it is the future which interests me more than the past — I seek to explain what will arrive in a future which for others has already begun. The world changes so quickly, from the social point of view rather than politically or morally, and the old standards become inapplicable; there still exist the mosaic fragments of thousands of years but nothing constructed today will last more than ten.

Women are always the first to adapt themselves to the demands of an epoch — they are stronger, more realistic, closer to nature. The loneliness which separates us from others and brings on the eclipse of all feelings is what Vittoria in the film feels above all else, but it is not a dramatic crisis or a moral one, it's a choice. Under her layer of anxiety she is serene enough. She knows, so does Piero, that they will not be able to love as they would want to, that they will not know how to live with this love. So he plunges back into his search for money, and she accepts it. She is resigned, but eventually she is smiling; love isn't everything. And up to now eclipses haven't been final.

I like to make myself believe that there is a life for me away from the cinema, but in all conscience I know very well it isn't true.



"... a shadowy painting like the academic portraits by Otto Propheter in the 1900s ..." — Monica Vitti and a contrast in elegance

Film Index

1942 Assistant to Marcel Carné on **Les Visiteurs du Soir.** Assistant to Enrico Fulchignoni on **I Due Foscari,** of which he wrote the screenplay. Co-writer, with Rosario Leone, Massimo Mida, Gherardo Gherardi, and Ugo Betti, of Rossellini's **Un Pilota Ritorna**.

1943-47 **Gente del Po** — written and directed by Antonioni. Photography by Piero Portalupi. Music by Mario Labroca. Production: I.C.E.T.

1947 Co-writer, with De Santis, Lizzani, Zavattini, Corrado Alvaro, Umberto Barbaro, and Tullio Pinelli, of **Caccia Tragica,** directed by Giuseppe De Santis.

1948 **Nettezza Urbana** (N.U.) — written and directed by Antonioni. Photography by Giovanni Ventimiglia. Music by Giovanni Fusco, with prelude by J. S. Bach. Production: Lux Film. Awarded Silver Ribband, 1948.

1948-49 **L'Amorosa Menzogna** — written and directed by Antonioni. Photography by Renato del Frate. Music by Giovanni Fusco. Production: Fortuna Film. Awarded Silver Ribband, 1949.

1949 **Superstizione** — written and directed by Antonioni. Photography by Giovanni Ventimiglia. Music by Giovanni Fusco. Production: Giorgio Venturini.

1949-50 **Sette canne, un vestito** — written and directed by Antonioni. Photography by Giovanni Ventimiglia. Production: I.C.E.T.

1950 **La Villa dei mostri** — written and directed by Antonioni. Photography by Giovanni De Paoli. Music by Giovanni Fusco. Production: Filmus.

1950 **La Funivia del Faloria** — written and directed by Antonioni. Photography by Goffredo Bellisario and Ghedina. Music and production by Teo Usuelli.

Film Index

1950 First feature film conceived and directed by Antonioni — **Cronaca di un Amore,** written by Antonioni, Daniele D'Anza, Silvo Giovaninetti, Francesco Maselli and Piero Tellini. Photography by Enzo Serafin. Art director: Piero Filippone. Costumes (for Lucia Bosè) by Ferdinando Sarmi. Music by Giovanni Fusco (saxophone played by Marcel Mule). Assistant director: Francesco Maselli. Director of production: Gino Rossi.

CAST: Lucia Bosè (Paola), Massimo Girotti (Guido), Ferdinando Sarmi (Fontana); with Gino Rossi, Marika Rowsky, Rosi Mirafiore, Rubi D'Alma.

PRODUCTION: Franco Villani and Stefano Caretta (Villani-Film).

SETTINGS: The outskirts and city of Milan; studios.

PREMIERES: Biarritz, Oct. 1950. Rome, 25th Nov. 1950. Paris, 1st June, 1951.

AWARDS: Silver Ribband 1950. Grand Prix for direction at the Festival of Punta del Este, 1951.

1952 **I Vinti** — directed by Antonioni from his own scenario, with additional material by Suso Cecchi D'Amico, Diego Fabbri, Giorgio Bassani, and Turi Vasile. Photography by Enzo Serafin. Art director: Gianni Polidori. Music by Giovanni Fusco. Assistant directors: Franco Rosi, Alain Cuny. Director of production: Paolo Moffa.

CAST: (Italian episode) Anna Maria Ferrero, Franco Interlenghi, Eduardo Cianelli, Evi Maltagliati, Umberto Spadaro, Gastone Renzelli; (British episode) Peter Reynolds, Patrick Barr, Fay Compton, Eileen Moore; (French episode) Henry Poirier, Jean-Pierre Mocky, Etchika Choureau, André Jacques, Annie Noël.

PRODUCTION: Film Costellazione, S.G.C.

SETTINGS: Rome, London, and Paris.

PREMIERES: Venice Festival, 4th Sept., 1953. The film is banned in France.

1952 Co-writer, with Fellini and Tullio Pinelli, of **Lo Sceicco Bianco,** directed by Federico Fellini.

1952-53 **La Signora senza Camelie** — directed by Antonioni from a scenario written by himself in collaboration with Suso Cecchi D'Amico, Francesco Maselli, and P. M. Pasinetti. Photography by Enzo Serafin. Art director: Gianni Polidori. Music by Giovanni Fusco. Assistant director: Francesco Maselli. Director of production: Vittorio Glori.

CAST: Lucia Bosè (Clara), Andrea Cecchi (Gianni), Gino Cervi (Ercole), Alain Cuny (Lodi), Ivan Desny (Nardo), Monica Clay (Simonetta), Anna Carena (Clara's mother), Enrico Glori (film director); and with Laura Tiberti, Oscar Andriani, Elio Steiner, Nino Del Fabbro.

PRODUCTION: Domenico Forges Davanzati, ENIC.

SETTINGS: Rome, Venice, and Milan; shot from Dec. 1952 to Feb. 1953.

PREMIERES: Rome, 27th Feb. 1953; Paris, 13th Sept. 1960.

1953 **Tentato Suicidio** — directed by Antonioni, an episodic (the second) in the film **L' Amore in Città,** first and final issue of a filmic journal called 'Lo Spettatore' put together by Cesare Zavattini, Ricardo Ghione, and Marco Ferreri. Written by Antonioni, Aldo Buzzi, Luigi Chiarina, Luigi Malerba, Tullio Pinelli, Vittorio Veltroni, and Cesare Zavattini. Photography by Gianni Di Venanzo. Art director: Gianni Polidori. Music by Mario Nascimbene. Assistant director: Luigi Vanzi. Director of production: Marco Ferreri.

CAST: The actual people whose suicide attempts are reported in the film.

PRODUCTION: Faro Film.

SETTINGS: Rome.

PREMIERES: Rome, 27th Nov. 1953; Paris, 8th Feb. 1957.

1955 **Uomini in piu** — documentary for C.I.M.E., dealing with problems of overpopulation and emigration in Italy.

1955 **Le Amiche** — directed by Antonioni from an adaptation of Cesare Pavese's story 'Tra Donne Sole' by Antonioni, Suso Cecchi D'Amico and Alba De Cespédes. Photography by Gianni Di Venanzo. Art director: Gianni Polidori. Music by Giovanni Fusco. Assistant director: Luigi Vanzi. Director of production: Pietro Notarianni.

CAST: Eleonora Rossi Drago (Clelia), Valentina Cortese (Nene), Yvonne Furneaux (Momina), Madeleine Fischer (Rosetta), Anna Maria Pancani (Mariella), Gabriele Ferzetti (Lorenzo), Ettore Manni (Carlo), Franco Fabrizi (Cesare), and Maria Gambarelli (Clelia's employer).

PRODUCTION: Trionfalcine.

SETTINGS: Turin.

PREMIERES: Venice, 7th Sept. 1955; Rome, 18th Nov. 1955; Paris, 6th Sept. 1957; London, 14th May, 1959.

Awards: Golden Lion, Venice Festival, 1955. Grolla d'oro, 1955. Nastro d'argento, 1955. Golden Star (Argentine), 1959.

1957 **Il Grido** — directed and written by Antonioni with additional material by Elio Bartolini and Ennio De Concini. Photography by Gianni Di Venanzo. Art director: Franco Fontana. Costumes by Pia Marchesi. Music by Giovanni Fusco. Assistant director, Luigi Vanzi. Director of production: Danilo Marciani.

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CAST: Steve Cochran (Aldo), Alida Valli (Irma), Betsy Blair (Elvira), Gabriella Palotti (Edera), Dorian Gray (Virginia), Lynn Shaw (Andreina), Mirna Girardi (Rosina), Gaetano Mattenoci (Edera's fiancé), Guerrino Campanili (Virginia's father), Pina Boldrini, and Pietro Corvelatti (the fisherman).

PRODUCTION: Franco Cancellieri (SPA Cinematografica) — Robert Alexander Productions (New York).

SETTINGS: Lower Po valley: Occhiobello, Portelogoscure, Stiena, Ferrare, Ca'Venier, and the Po delta. Shot in winter 1956-57.

PREMIERES: Locarno, 14th July, 1957; Rome, 29th Nov. 1957; Paris, 3rd Dec 1958; London, 21st Sept. 1961

AWARDS: Grand Prix, Locarno Critics, 1957. Prize from Cologne Critics, 1960.

1957 Technical supervision by Antonioni of the film **Questro nostro mondo,** directed by Ugo Lazzari, Eros Macchi, and Angelo Negri.

I am a camera — a stage production directed by Antonioni of the play by John Van Druten. With Monica Vitti as Sally Bowles.

1959 **L'Avventura** — directed by Antonioni from his own scenario, with additional material by Elio Bartolini, and Tonino Guerra. Photography by Aldo Scavarda. Art director: Piero Poletto. Costumes by Adriana Berselli. Music by Giovanni Fusco. Assistant directors: Franco Indovina, and Gianni Arduini. Director of production: Luciano Perugia.

CAST: Monica Vitti (Claudia) Gabriele Ferzetti (Sandro), Lea Massari (Anna), Dominique Blanchar (Giulia) James Addams (Corrado), Esmeralda Ruspoli (Patrizia), Lelio Lutazzi (Raimondo), Renzo Ricci (Anna's father), Dorothy De Poliolo (Gloria Perkins), and with Giovanni Petrucci, Enrico Bologna, Franco Cimino, Giovanni Danesi, Rita Molè, Renato Pinciroli, Angela Tommasi di Lampedusa, and Vincenzo Tranchina.

PRODUCTION: Cino Del Duca co-production: Produzioni Cinématografiche Europée (Rome), and Société Cinématographique Lyre (Paris).

SETTINGS: Rome, the Sicilian islands of Lipari and Milazzo, and the towns of Catane, and Taormina: shot from Sept 1959 to Jan. 1960.

PREMIERES: Paris, 13th Sept. 1960; Bologna, 25th Sept. 1960; Milan, 18th Oct. 1960; Rome, 2nd Nov. 1960; London, 24th Nov. 1960.

AWARDS: Special Jury Prize, Cannes, 1960. Prix de la Nouvelle critique. Sutherland Prize (London), 1960. Nastro d'argento, 1961, for the music by Giovanni Fusco. Prize awarded by the foreign press, for Monica Vitti's performance. La Caveja d'oro (for the film and Monica Vitti's performance). Il Saraceno d'oro (for film acting). Crystal Star (to Monica Vitti).

1960 **La Notte** — directed by Antonioni from a scenario written by himself in collaboration with Ennio Flaiano and Tonino Guerra. Photography by Gianni Di Venanzo. Art Director: Piero Zuffi. Music by Giorgio Gaslini. Assistant directors: Franco Indovina and Albero Pecosso. Director of production: Paolo Frasca.

CAST: Jeanne Moreau (Lidia), Marcello Mastroianni (Giovanni), Monica Vitti (Valentina), Bernhard Wicki (Tommaso), Rosy Mazzacurati (Maria Theresa), Maria Pia Luzi (the nymphomaniac), Guido Ajmone Marsan (Fanti), Vincenzo Corbella (Gherardini), Gitt Magrini (Gherardini's wife), Giorgio Negro (Roberto), and Roberta Speroni (Beatrice); with Ugo Fortunati, Vittorio Bertolini, and Pompiani.

PRODUCTION: Co-production, Nepi-Film and Silva-Film (Rome) with Sofitedip (Paris).

SETTINGS: Milan, July and August, 1960.

PREMIERES: Milan, 24th Jan. 1961; Rome, 1st Feb. 1961; Paris, 24th Feb. 1961; London, 18th Jan. 1962.

AWARDS: Golden Bear, Berlin, 1961. FIPRESCI prize for all Antonioni's films, Berlin, 1961. Silver Ribband, 1961 (for Monica Vitti's supporting performance). Critics' Award, St. Vincent, 1961 (for Monica Vitti).

1961 **L'Eclisse** — directed by Antonioni from a scenario written by himself in collaboration with Tonino Guerra, Elio Bartolini and Ottiero Ottieri. Photography by Gianni Di Venanzo. Art Director: Piero Roletto. Music by Giovanni Fusco. Editing by Eraldo Da Roma. Assistant directors: Franco Indovina and Gianni Arduini. Director of production: Danilo Marciani.

CAST: Monica Vitti (Vittoria), Alain Delon (Piero), Francisco Rabal (Riccardo), Lilla Brignone (Vittoria's mother), Rossana Rory (Anita), Mirella Ricciardi (Marta), Louis Seigner (Ercoli), and Cyrus Elias (the drunk).

PRODUCTION: Co-production, Paris-Film with Interopa, Cineriz (Rome).

SETTINGS: Rome and Verona, September and October, 1961.

PREMIERES: Rome, April, 1962; Paris, September, 1962; London 31st Jan. 1963.

AWARDS: Special Jury Prize, Cannes, 1962.

1963 **Deserto Rosso** — written and directed by Antonioni, and his first film in colour.

CAST: Monica Vitti, Hardy Kruger.

SETTINGS: Ravenna, from Feb. 1963.

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Three invaluable sources of information have been Paul-Louis Thirard's monograph on Antonioni, published in December 1960 as Premier Plan No. 15: Pierre Leprohon's biography of Antonioni in the series 'Cinema d'Aujourd'hui (No. 2, 1961); and John Francis Lane's text of 'L'Eclisse', published in Italy in 1962.

I have also had occasion to quote from the following:

Positif No. 30 (July, 1959)
Cahiers du Cinema, Nos. 110 and 112 (Aug. and Oct. 1960)
Sight and Sound, Winter 1960-61
Film Culture, Spring 1962
New York Film Bulletin, June 1962.
Positif, March 1962.

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